

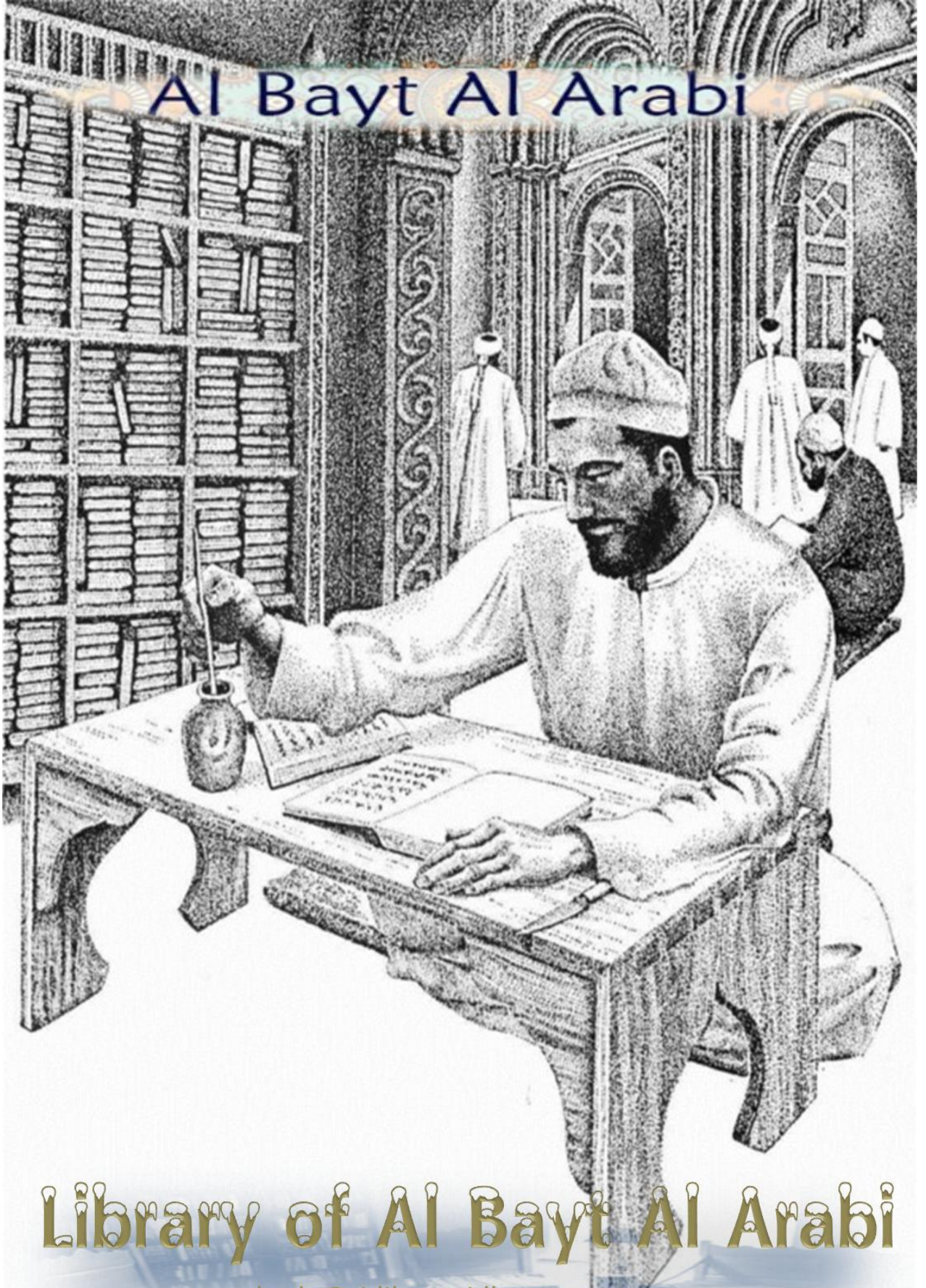
*Danièle Joly*

# The French Communist Party and the Algerian War





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# THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE ALGERIAN WAR

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# **The French Communist Party and the Algerian War**

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**Palgrave Macmillan**

ISBN 978-1-349-21289-7      ISBN 978-1-349-21287-3 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-21287-3

All rights reserved. For information, write:  
Scholarly and Reference Division,  
St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue,  
New York, N.Y. 10010

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1991

First published in the United States of America in 1991

Phototypeset by Input Typesetting Ltd, London

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Joly, Danièle

The French Communist Party and the Algerian War/Danièle Joly.

p.      cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-312-04211-0

1. Algeria—History—Revolution, 1954–1962—Public opinion.

2. Parti communiste français.    3. Communists—France—Attitudes.

4. Public opinion—France.    I. Title.

DT295.J63    1991

90–34612

965'.04—dc20

CIP

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# Glossary

## VOCABULARY

**Appelés** The French army is composed of conscripts and professionals. The conscripts are called up for their national service, hence their designation as '*appelés*'; they may be recalled for a further period of service after they have completed their time, they are then '*rappelés*'. The 'Mouvement des appelés et rappelés' was a protest movement among conscripts against being sent to fight in North Africa in 1955 and 1956.

**Arab-Berber** The Algerian population prior to the French colonisation was mainly composed of Arabs and Berbers who as one group are called Arab-Berbers. This term is preferable to the term Algerians, which leads to confusion as it could be taken to include the settlers. Another word was sometimes used to designate Arab-Berbers: *les Musulmans*, as most of them were Muslims.

**Autochtone** Native of the territory. This was the name given to the deputies from the empire in the National Assembly in 1946: *le groupe autochtone*. This term is also sometimes used instead of *indigène*, which had become derogatory in the colonies.

**Code de l'indigénat** See *indigène*.

**Le contingent** This is the collective noun to designate all the conscripts serving in the army to fulfil their obligation to national service.

**Indigène** Literally translated as 'native'; the term assumed a specific significance in French colonies as it implied a legal status. The *indigènes* did not benefit from the same jurisdiction as the French citizens. They were far from enjoying the same rights, and were treated under a special code (in Algeria since 1881), *le code de l'indigénat*, which restricted and controlled all aspects of the life and activities of the *indigènes*. Infringements of this code, entailing various punishments (fines, gaol sentences), included 'offending words' against any representative of the authorities, travelling without authorisation, or holding a public meal without authorisation, etc.

**Insoumis, insoumission** The *insoumis* was the soldier who refused to go and fight in Algeria, performing the act of *insoumission*. The movement as a whole was sometimes called *le refus*.

**Muslim** See Arab-Berber.

**Mouvement des appelés et rappelés** See *appelés*.

**Oppositionnels** Members of the PCF who criticised its policies in one or several points, sufficiently consistently or strongly to have become noticeable as an opposition force within the Party. The term came to have a clear meaning during the Algerian war.

**Rappelés** See *appelés*.

**Ultras** The *ultras* were ultra-colonialists in Algiers, extreme right-wing settlers who wanted to keep Algeria French at all costs.

## MAIN ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR LEADERS

**Association des Oulema** See *oulema*.

**Association des Amis du Manifeste et de la liberté** See Ferhat Abbas.

**CRUA** See FLN.

**ENA** See Messali Hadj.

**Fédération des Elus** See Ferhat Abbas.

**Ferhat Abbas** Born in Taher (1899), doctorate in Pharmacy, President of the Association des Étudiants Musulmans d'Afrique du Nord (AEMAN), 1924–9). He founded in 1927, together with Dr Bendjelloul the Fédération des Elus Indigènes. He was at first a supporter of assimilation. During the Second World War he wrote the Manifeste du Peuple algérien, which was signed by 56 Muslim *notables* and was presented to the French authorities (a programme of reforms rejecting assimilation). He founded the Association des Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté (1944), banned in 1945. Arrested in the aftermath of the May 1945 events, he founded the Union Démocratique du Manifeste algérien (UDMA) in 1946. He joined the FLN (May/June 1955). He became the first president of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République algérienne (GPRA) in 1958 and president of the Constituent Assembly after independence in 1963.

**FLN** The Front de Libération Nationale was founded as a result of a crisis within the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratique (MTLD), which split into Messali Hadj's followers and the 'Centralistes', supporters of the Central Committee (1954). A third organisation was also created, the Comité révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action (CRUA). It was led by nine MTLD members, most of whom had participated in the Organisation Speciale (OS), a para-military organisation founded by the MTLD (1947–8). They decided to prepare the insurrection and set up the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN). They proclaimed the creation of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN).

**Messali Hadj** Born in May 1898 in Tlemcen, Messali Hadj emigrated to France in 1923 and worked in various factories including Renault. He joined the PCF which he left to take over the leadership of the Etoile Nord Africaine (ENA) in June 1926. After the ENA was banned, Messali founded the Parti du Peuple algérien (PPA) in March 1937. Arrested several times and exiled in Brazzaville (Equatorial Africa), he returned to Algeria to create the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (MTLD) after the PPA was banned (1945). He never accepted the leadership of the FLN and created the Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) at the end of 1954.

**MNA** See Messali Hadj.

**MTLD** See Messali Hadj.

**Oulema** Literally, the word means learned men of the faith (singular, *alim*). An association of *oulema* was formed in 1931, with the aim of preserving

Islam, the Arabic language and Algeria against French colonialism. Sheikh Ben Badis was one of their leaders. Tewfik El Madani became the general secretary of the association.

**PPA** See Messali Hadj.

**Sheikh Ben Badis** See *oulema*.

**Tewfik El Madani** See *oulema*.

**UDMA** See Ferhat Abbas.



# Preface

The general aim of this work is to evaluate the evolution of PCF policies towards the question of Algeria during the Algerian war. The more specific object of the research will be the 'debate' on Algeria within the PCF, or, to be more accurate, the divergences between the Party's official political line and a possible 'opposition'.

The corpus of the study was relatively easy to circumscribe, at least with respect to the official position of the PCF. There is abundant literature to choose from and a vast range of Party publications have been reviewed, starting with Party congresses which crystallise the programme of the PCF. Other publications were also studied: among the main ones, *l'Humanité*, which is read by the largest number of members and sympathisers; more theoretical publications such as the *Cahiers du Communisme*, *Économie et Politique* and *Nouvelle Critique*, which have a more limited circulation, and *France Nouvelle*, mainly read by Party members. I also surveyed the speeches of PCF members in the National Assembly and occasional publications such as pamphlets, course texts and books.

The problem encountered was much greater when I attempted to investigate the debate within the Party, as the PCF still preserved organisational principles dating back to its creation, inspired by Lenin's Party of a new type.<sup>1</sup> According to this model, any debate must take place strictly inside the Party through the correct channels permitted by democratic centralism;<sup>2</sup> this rules out factions and forbids the voicing of differences outside the Party. The official position, agreed upon by the highest echelons of the Party, its congress, is the only one to be known to the public and must be defended by all the Party members, even if they have or have had any reservations on it, or frankly disagreed. The monolithic nature of the organisation as described above makes it plain that the expression of divergences or disagreements will be difficult to locate. These may nevertheless be gathered from varied sources.

Prior to each congress, a forum is opened in *l'Humanité*, the Tribune de Discussion, for the publication of letters on the

proposed congress theses. The debate is then officially allowed in the open though in practice limited, because the editorial board carefully selects these letters. On the whole they present a mild version of the criticisms that may be expressed within the Party and an immediate answer to these letters is often provided on the same page, through another letter, or a statement by a PCF official. Sometimes official answers and explanations on a point of policy reveal the existence of substantial criticisms on the issue.

During the period under study (1954–62), a number of reviews were initiated and published by Party members who were intent on expressing their opposition; these reviews were generally dispatched to a mailing list composed of Party members or ex-members. They were naturally in breach of the rules and rarely had signed articles.

In addition actions and participation in broad organisations other than the Party's approved activities reveal some members' differences with the official line.

In order to complement this fragmented information, I carried out a large number of interviews with individuals who were active during the Algerian war, Party members, *oppositionalists*\* and Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) activists. These interviews on their own cannot constitute historical evidence; they were instrumental in confirming or nuancing what the texts revealed; they often provided a good guideline on the mood within the Party at a particular period in time and enabled me to conduct an enlightened study of PCF texts which can be sibylline and lend themselves to different possible interpretations. Other documents have also been consulted such as FLN texts and non-communist publications dealing with the Algerian war, in order to attain a broader perspective on the question.

The nature of the 'opposition' itself imposed upon the research a thematic approach. There was no organised, coherent, well-defined opposition, but rather a collection of *oppositionalists*, who questioned the Party line in varying degrees. On the other hand, there were a few main issues around which the debate was crystallised.

My approach is therefore diachronic in so far as a particular question is examined in its historical development – comparing texts dealing with the same theme written at different dates.

It is also synchronic in so far as different texts written during the same period have been confronted.

The character of the documents under study necessitates certain comments. The overall importance of texts must be borne in mind in a study of the PCF. Texts published by the Party are discussed at length beforehand, each word is carefully weighed up, and no part of a declaration is accidental. This is particularly true of official texts, such as congress theses, which become law within the Party. For the PCF, texts provide the whole basis of its policies. Consequently a good deal of this book rests on text analysis. A number of rules can be applied to identify the full meaning beneath the surface of the written word. The PCF speech can only be grasped in the light of its heritage.

The Party is in a way a prisoner of its own principles, or rather the principles laid down by the mentors universally recognised by the International Communist Movement (ICM), so that the PCF texts generally prefer to nuance those principles instead of refuting them. Rather than being rejected, a principle will be vehemently reaffirmed, to prove the Party's fidelity to it, before it is qualified to such an extent that its significance is reversed: for instance, the Party insisted on the right of nations to self-determination in the same breath as it stated that French colonies should remain French.

The Party rarely disputes Marx, Engels and Lenin's authority; on the contrary, they are paid due respect. If the PCF wants to justify a policy, it quotes its 'classics'; all the more so as its position differs from whatever happens to be the orthodox 'Marxist-Leninist' view at the time. In such cases, reference to Lenin or Marx serves as a legitimisation of the PCF's policy; their name suffices as a guarantee even if the meaning of what they said has first been reinterpreted by the Party.

The reader of PCF documents needs to have some prior knowledge of Marxism and of the Party's history and phraseology. Seemingly trivial differences (which have very precise significance in Marxist terminology) may uncover two diametrically opposed lines of policy; for instance, the proposal of '*liberté*' or '*indépendance*' applied to French colonies had totally opposite implications. It is often more important to notice what has not been said than what is spelt out. The reader familiar



with communist ideology learns to predict the likely response of the Party to a specific situation and the absence of an expected slogan assumes great significance: one had to notice that the Party failed to promote Algerian independence when the insurrection started. Indeed, particular attention must be paid to euphemisms, connotations and implications. The same slogan has differing meanings at different times according to the context wherein it has been held up.<sup>3</sup> The reader must beware when a slogan or a policy is being reasserted. It may indicate that the Party's understanding of it is undergoing changes, and only a slight nuance in the formulation of it betrays a radical change: in 1958, the PCF proclaimed '*unité d'action à la base*' with socialists as it was launching a virulent attack against the Socialist Party; earlier on (in 1956), it would have said '*unité d'action*' without qualification. Alternatively the PCF official emphasis on a slogan may indicate that it has encountered the fire of internal criticism. It would then be accompanied with additional explanations. If those criticisms are strong and numerous and if the development of events lends them too much credence, the Party will rarely recognise that it was in the wrong. Self-criticism is not common practice in the PCF (though it has happened in the past). Instead of acknowledging that it was mistaken, the Party would simply change the interpretation of what it declared previously to suit its most recent position or it speaks of an erroneous 'implementation' of its policy: this was the answer supplied to critics about its vote in favour of the Special Powers in 1956.

The greatest difficulty resides in the fact that one rarely obtains a precise, explicit and definitive formulation from the PCF. Formulae are left vague and open to interpretation; only a careful observation of their context brings their significance to light; this could be compared to Dominique Labbé's 'metaphorical axis'<sup>4</sup> on a larger scale. The position of words or resolutions, the rank of the person speaking translate the hierarchy of priorities in the eyes of the Party, sometimes better than what is being said. One of the persons interviewed said that his first task whilst reading the congress theses consisted of singling out the phrase 'independence for Algeria'; whether it appeared in the first, fourth or tenth line in the Party programme would tell the real importance accorded to it by the PCF.

One essential characteristic of the PCF is that its policies derive from global theoretical analyses, combined with the 'scientific' study of specific situations and phenomena. This is what the PCF claims and it needs to be verified; as a result one must necessarily pay attention to the possible discrepancies between words and deeds, between reality and the Party's version of it. One finds that the scientific approach is frequently lacking. The Party can portray the reality it strives towards as though it had been attained already, or selects the facts that suit its preconceptions. However, the interactions and dynamism between its practice, its policies, its theory and ideology remain the most interesting element of research on the PCF.

A few technical problems were encountered. A phenomenon that took place in France cannot be so easily expressed in a language other than French. Some terms describe realities that have no equivalent in another language or culture. In those instances, I use the 'foreign', i.e. the indigenous, word in French and append an asterisk to indicate that an explanation of the word is to be found in the Glossary; *oppositionnel*,\* though rather awkward, is kept for this reason. French features of civilisation, such as the characteristics of the army, are retained, such as the *appelés*\* and *rappelés*,\* the *contingent*,\* and others relating to legal or administrative definitions like *indigènes*,\* etc. A few Arab words remain, because they were in use in French texts themselves.

The designation of Algeria's inhabitants introduced an ideological dilemma because it depended upon the definition of 'Algerian' and of the Algerian nation. In order not to pre-empt on that definition, I have tried to avoid the term 'Algerian'. I choose to use the word 'settlers' whenever I refer to inhabitants of French or European origin in Algeria; for the original inhabitant of Algeria (already there before French colonisation), I generally say Arab-Berber\* which appears to be the most accurate appellation. Other words such as 'Muslim' were used by both the PCF and the French administration.

\* Throughout the text, words followed by an asterisk are defined in the Glossary.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to all the people, friends and family who inspired me and encouraged me in the research which led to this publication. In particular I am grateful to the persons who kindly agreed to be interviewed and whose names are to be found in the bibliography, to Jolyon Howarth who supervised the thesis on which this book is based, to Douglas Johnson for his comments and observations, to Khurshed Wadia who did the difficult job of finalising the translation of the quotes from French into English and to Gustavo Jara who insisted that this work should be published. My thanks also go to the librarians in France and in Britain who enabled me to find the documents needed.



# Introduction

The PCF today commands a substantial portion of the French electorate despite its relative loss of influence in the 1981 presidential and legislative elections. Election results do not suffice to give an accurate measure of the PCF's importance as an integral part of the fabric of French society. Closely intertwined in over sixty years of French history, the PCF also claims for itself part of the French national heritage, its historical figures and its myths. Moreover, the significance of the PCF is enhanced by its international dimension, as one element of the world communist movement.

The Algerian war itself assumed a double dimension. It had the greatest impact on France, sounding the final toll of the French colonial empire, shaking the political balance of forces in France, affecting all sections of opinion. It was also the symptom and manifestation of a world-wide phenomenon: the decolonisation process. The old empires were being destroyed, newly independent states flourished, a restructuring of spheres of influence took place. National liberation movements in the colonies contributed a great deal to the shape of the world as we know it now.

During the Algerian war the PCF traversed a continuous period of stress, perhaps the worst since the Party had become stabilised into a mass party (after 1935). The PCF had undoubtedly encountered great difficulties before 1954. During the Second World War, the Party had to cope with the Nazi occupation and a collaborationist French government. Repression did not facilitate its activities, but apart from the confusion and dilemma resulting from the Germano-Soviet pact (1939) the PCF's task, though arduous, was relatively clear and little internal disagreement could divide the Party over its main objective. Fighting the Nazis satisfied both its national and international duties, and its perceived role as the Party of the proletariat was fulfilled as well. It joined in the general struggle against fascism following in the same alignment of forces as the USSR, the 'motherland' of socialism. It also fought for the liberation of France and the French working

masses from the Nazi yoke. In France itself it gained much popularity.

During the cold war the PCF again journeyed through hard times. It was harassed and isolated, pushed back into opposition. However, it went through that crisis relatively smoothly as the menace of repression tightened the ranks of party members and fellow travellers. The Party could feel confident that it was in the right as the very cold war that was directed against the Soviet Union manifested itself in France as an offensive against 'progressive forces' and undermined the political and material gains of the working class. Opposing the USA and the cold war appeared as a defensible strategy from all angles. The war in Indo-China could have caused a dilemma for the PCF because it called upon the Party to support a war waged against France. But in reality it did not constitute any substantial problem. The struggle in Indo-China was led by communists; they fought against the French government which threw the PCF into the opposition. After some hesitation, the PCF identified this same government as the ally of the USA (the 'spearhead of imperialism'). Consequently, the PCF was not faced with conflicting tasks. Its various responsibilities were seen by the Party as harmoniously interconnected.

The Algerian war because of its specific nature and its timing posed much greater problems for the PCF. It is in time of crisis and under external pressure that internal contradictions are brought out: the Algerian war played that role for the PCF and exacerbated inner conflicts. France was engaged in a last protracted battle to preserve its colonial empire; it was doomed to lose. This war was of great consequence for France, because of the closeness of ties between France and Algeria; moreover, her perceived moral obligation – to defend the interests of French settlers in Algeria – made it more difficult for her to relinquish her hold over Algeria. The insoluble situation and the character of the war, which involved a whole generation of young Frenchmen from 1956 to 1962 as conscripted soldiers were sent to Algeria and erected torture en masse as one of its staple war strategies, destabilised the French national scene. Eventually the Fourth Republic fell, opening the way for a 'strong' presidential regime in 1958 with De Gaulle at its head, among the threatening shadows of fascist enterprises in Algeria. De Gaulle's coming to power was largely due to pressure from

extreme right-wing elements in Algiers, acting with the sympathies of ruling army circles, and bordered on illegality. Some important strata of French society were particularly affected by the war, such as the youth and the army, entailing a polarisation of political opinions.

This period was a time of turmoil for the PCF for other reasons. It witnessed great upheavals in the International Communist Movement (ICM), the beginnings of a major split which was not to heal. One of the issues at stake was to lead to a re-evaluation of national liberation movements in the colonies.

In the midst of these storms the PCF could not remain unscathed and faced a trying test. The first questions to be asked now are these: Where did the PCF stand *vis à vis* the Algerian war? Did the PCF concentrate on solving problems within France or on supporting a national liberation struggle which was waging a war against France itself? Did it succeed in reconciling its national and internationalist responsibilities? Surprised by the Algerian uprising, like the rest of the French people and politicians, the PCF leaders did not immediately realise the extent and significance of the conflict. Members of the Party became impatient with the PCF's apparent restraint on the Algerian question. They questioned different aspects of the PCF's policy or its whole fundamental approach to the war.

Prior to an examination of Party policies during the Algerian war, a three-dimensional perspective must be introduced:

1. The particular nature of the relationship between France and Algeria – the history of French colonisation in Algeria – will throw light on the difficulties met by France and the PCF in negotiating the idea of Algeria's separation from France.
2. The PCF's heritage on the colonial question and the evolution of its policy on the colonies since its foundation will provide a guideline for an understanding of its attitude towards the Algerian war.
3. A synthetic view of the PCF's policies during the Algerian war, encompassing developments in France, on an international level and in the International Communist Movement will help to clarify a very complex situation.

These presentations constitute the first three chapters and set the scene for an analysis of the PCF's policies during the Algerian war.

Three main axes crystallise discussions within the Party about the Algerian war:

1. The relationship between Algeria and France and the Party's concept of the French nation were a determinant factor of its outlook on Algeria (Chapter 4).
2. The PCF analysis of the Algerian Liberation Movement and its definition of the Algerian nation provoked intense controversy (Chapter 5).
3. The Party's response to France's military involvement in Algeria was the most openly challenged of its policies (Chapter 6).

A few key questions have to be asked. Did the Algerian war signify the continuation of an ongoing policy or a rupture? Did it provoke a major internal crisis for the Party? Was the 'opposition' qualitatively any different from what it had been previously? The Algerian war revealed the Party in relation to its national role and its internationalist responsibilities.

Can one say that it is clear from an analysis of the PCF's reaction to the Algerian war that the Party finally revealed itself, during the period 1954–62, as fundamentally integrated into the political structures and value systems of the French Republic? Can one date the PCF's possible 'domestication' from this period? Above all, is it fair to argue that, prior to the Algerian war, any serious critique of the PCF from a left viewpoint was impossible, whereas during and after the war the bases of such a critique (which were to inform the politics of the left throughout the 60s and 70s) were laid? Can one therefore speak of the Algerian war as a major ideological turning point in the history of the PCF?

# 1 Algeria Under French Colonisation

The Algerian war was eventually to become the classical example of a rearguard battle waged by a colonialist power to retain its empire against the odds of history. The 3,700 French troops which landed in the bay of Sidi-Ferruch on 14 June 1830 were faced with a prolonged armed resistance which was only put down in 1871. Thereafter the resistance to French colonisation remained latent until the armed struggle flared up on a national scale in the 1954–62 war. For a communist party, the general analysis of this modern version of the war was that of a national liberation movement fighting for independence against an imperialist power. But the particular form of the war, the issues involved and its impact on France itself are more complex and can only be understood through a concrete observation of the relationship between Algeria and France.

The history of French colonisation in Algeria wove tight links between the two territories. Successive French governments showed a constant concern for Algeria which was translated into a specific administrative and political status different from that accorded to other colonies. The existence of an important French settlers' community in Algeria contributed to the particular nature of the relationship between Algeria and France, and provided a powerful 'Algerian lobby'. The geographical proximity, the frequency and intensity of exchanges between the two lands and the century-old French occupation added to the particular character of Algeria, and further strengthened its ties with France. Meanwhile, the colonial situation of the Arab-Berber population played its role as a potent centrifugal force, all the more explosive as its needs and demands would be left unanswered for 124 years. The slow awakening of the Algerian national movement accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century leading to the Algerian war.

## FRENCH COLONISATION IN ALGERIA

### **Political and Administrative Status of Algeria**

At the moment of the outbreak of the war, Algeria was considered as an integral part of France according to the official interpretation of the French government. This had not changed very much since the nineteenth century. As late as 1956, it was made very clear by Guy Mollet declaring that Algeria constituted a part of the French Republic and was 'irrevocably' French.<sup>1</sup>

Vast numbers of French people accepted this thesis; it was taught diligently on school benches in France and in Algeria. The real situation was more difficult to define, as shown by Charles-André Julien noting the endless debate on Algeria's original situation.<sup>2</sup>

The dilemma faced by jurists and their conclusion about Algeria, a 'creation *sui generis*' underlined the unique nature of the Algerian problem. The dual character of Algeria, in some respects an 'extension of France' but also a colony, and the tight knit relationship between Algeria and France must be examined for a better understanding of the extreme complexity of the decolonisation process.

The initial occupation of Algeria by the army in 1830 placed it under military rule as was to happen in most later French colonial conquests. The Arab Bureaux, composed of military officers, took in hand the administration of each area, fulfilling the task of organising the colony. Algeria was ruled by decrees and a Governor General was appointed. Considerable changes in the administration of Algeria were to be brought in by the Second and Third Republics. These led to an integration of Algeria with France.

The 1848 Republic promoted both the settlement of French settlers and the concept of 'assimilation'<sup>3</sup> whereby Algeria was to be considered as part of France.

The Second Republic, in an attempt to emulate its predecessor took up assimilationism and proceeded to treat Algeria as being on a par with France, i.e. it benefited from similar administrative structures and its population could enjoy the status of French citizens. Algeria was to be divided, like the rest of France into *départements* (three) and a varying number

of *arrondissements* administered by *préfets* and *sous-préfets*. General and municipal councils were instituted for the French settlers who could also elect representatives (three) to the French National Assembly. Vast territories occupied by Arabs and Berbers were ruled by the Arab Bureaux, as before.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that assimilation only applied to the settlers whereas the Arab-Berber population retained its colonial status.

During the Second Empire policies *vis-à-vis* Algeria underwent considerable fluctuations but did not introduce any substantial changes that would outlive the Sedan defeat (1871).

It fell upon the Third Republic to give Algeria its definitive status. On the whole the Third Republic resumed the work of the Second for the continuing integration of Algeria's administrative and political structure into that of the mother country.

In a first stage the three *départements* of Algeria had *préfets* responsible directly to the Ministry of the Interior; the system of *rattachements* subordinated Algeria to nine ministries (Justice, Education, etc.). By 31 December 1896 with the end of *rattachements* a Governor General assisted by a Superior Council regained authority over the Administration: its agents were civil servants from the *métropole* (mainland France). Algeria retained its three deputies in the National Assembly elected by the settlers (i.e. French citizens) and gained a Senator in 1875. Algeria was subdivided into three categories of *communes*:

1. 296 '*communes de plein exercice*' which could be compared to 'mainland' France *communes* in administration, with their elected municipality;
2. 78 '*communes mixtes*' run by an appointed administrator, assisted by elected representatives;
3. a number of military enclaves, '*communes subdivisionnaires*' under the order of an army officer.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the settlers fully took part in the running of the territory, the limitations imposed to Arab-Berber representation rendered their participation ineffectual.<sup>6</sup> The Arab-Berbers had the worst of both worlds: On the one hand they suffered the *code de l'indigénat*\*<sup>7</sup> as though Algeria was the very same as other French colonies. On the other hand, Arab-Berbers were further disadvantaged by Algeria's official status as French *départements*, which delivered control to the settlers. The *indigènes* suffered more at the hands of the settlers whose

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interests directly conflicted with their own than if they had been ruled by decisions emanating from the Ministry of Colonies. The *communes de plein exercice* are a good example of the uncontrolled plundering of Arab-Berber population, all the by-laws on land tenure and taxation being passed by a settlers-run municipality.<sup>8</sup>

Whenever an attempt was made 'from Paris' to improve the situation of the *indigènes* it encountered open hostility on the part of the settlers who did their best to neutralise it. Clémenceau on 4 February 1919 opened up limited possibilities for *indigènes* to become French citizens.<sup>9</sup> This policy of Clémenceau was intended to recompense the participation of Arab-Berbers in French trenches during the war.

Little of it materialised, partly because of the numerous restrictions imposed but mainly as a result of the opposition of the settlers. Meanwhile their power had continued to grow thanks to a powerful Algerian lobby in Parliament. Their pressure had already led to the creation of the Délégations Financières in 1898, which the settlers controlled. The Délégations, consultative at first, soon had the upper hand over all of Algeria's finances. The budget for Algeria, proposed by the Governor, depended on their approval. This assumed paramount importance when Algeria was granted financial autonomy (except for military expenses) and 'civilian personality'.<sup>10</sup> The Délégations included forty-four French citizens in addition to twenty-two, then twenty-four Arab-Berber representatives, who had been carefully vetted by the 'Administration' ensuring their total loyalty to the Governor.<sup>11</sup>

The situation outlined above remained the same until the Fourth Republic. The Popular Front which raised hopes of amelioration among the Arab-Berbers remained powerless in front of the settlers' obstruction. Its most significant proposal, the Blum-Violette project,<sup>12</sup> was not even discussed in the National Assembly because of the settlers' opposition.

The general set-up in Algeria had proved to be well established and resilient to change. The settlers, satisfied with the status quo, successfully resisted any alteration in favour of the *indigènes* intended by the French government. This pattern was to be followed up until the insurrection.

During the Second World War Algeria came under the rule of Vichy until 8 November 1942, when it became a base for



the Allies. The relative weakness of Free France and the need to win the support of Arab-Berbers to its side in the war effort led De Gaulle to promise a number of reforms.<sup>13</sup>

During and after the war, it had become impossible to ignore totally the pressing demands of Algerian nationalists. The status of Algeria was to be reconsidered by the new government of France (after the Liberation of France). The Assembly eventually proclaimed the new 'statute' of Algeria on 20 September 1947. It was intended as a limited compromise for a better Arab-Berber representation. For that reason it encountered the open hostility of the Algerian settlers.

Algeria was still a part of France though it gained a greater measure of autonomy. It had *personnalité civile* and financial autonomy and an organisation of its own including a Governor General, a Conseil de Gouvernement, a Central Administration and an Algerian Assembly.<sup>14</sup> The 1947 Statute gave Algeria the final shape it was to preserve until the 1954 insurrection. A Governor General appointed by France remained in charge of all civil servants and the military. A system of dual electoral college allowed non-European representation.<sup>15</sup> Legislative powers were the prerogative of the French National Assembly which could apply to Algeria constitutional laws, and the civil and criminal codes. However, this process was not automatic as in the rest of the French territory. New laws would become applicable to Algeria only if the National Assembly expressly specified so. It was the responsibility of an Algerian Assembly to extend and adapt 'metropolitan' laws applicable to Algeria. It could also pass by-laws thereafter to be sanctioned by decrees, and it decided on the Algerian budget and taxation. The Algerian Assembly was a remake of the old Délégations Financières with additional attributes, and a different composition: out of 120 members, 60 were elected from the first college (464 000 French electors) and 60 from the second college (1 400 000 Arab-Berber votes).<sup>16</sup> In the last analysis, although the Algerian Assembly enabled Arab-Berbers to have a say in the running of the territory, this participation remained theoretical and inequitable for several reasons. It was not really representative as far as the Algerian population was concerned; in 1947, 922 000 Europeans were given the same degree of representation as 7 860 000 *indigènes* as a result of the dual college system.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, it merely masqueraded as a demo-

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cratic body since it functioned by openly admitted electoral frauds and the silencing of Arab-Berber organisations. It became so well known that the term of 'élections à l'algérienne' was used as a synonym of rigged elections. 'In March 1949, in Boudouka, only 101 voters took part in the polls: according to the official results, 700 votes went to the candidate put forward by the Establishment.'<sup>18</sup>

In practice the Algerian Assembly was used as a key instrument of power by the settlers, who put a brake on the implementation of laws which did not meet their interests, since laws passed in Paris were subject to the approval of the Algerian Assembly before they were introduced in Algeria. 'Concessions' granted to the Arab-Berbers, such as voting rights for women, the right to control the Muslim cult (up until then the Islamic clergy had been appointed by the administration) and the teaching of Arabic, remained empty promises.

This whole state of affairs reflected the inheritance of a well-established routine. The peculiar status of Algeria handed over to the settlers an overwhelming political weight, which tied the hands of the French government, thus further degrading the situation of the Arab-Berber populations. Meanwhile, official texts continued to declare that Algeria was France and a good number of French people believed this to be so. The thwarted aspirations of the Arab-Berbers who could witness the inanity of democratic channels, would be all the greater for it. A violent outcome was inevitable.

### **Economic Aspects of Algeria's Relationship with France**

Historically, Algeria was the first of the 'new' French colonies. Most of the old ones such as Canada were lost by the beginning of the eighteenth century. For this reason and because Algeria was conquered much earlier than the possessions of the new colonial empire (after the mid-century), it combined the features of the two forms of colonisation described by Jules Ferry: 'That which offers asylum and work to the surplus populations of poor countries . . . that which accommodates peoples possessing surplus capital or goods. The latter is the current, up to date, most widespread and most lucrative form.'<sup>19</sup>

As an outlet for French settlers as well as for capital and

manufactured goods this dual role of Algeria explains to a great extent the specific problems faced by the process of colonisation. The substantial settlement of settlers brought Algeria closer to France than any other colony. It had in its making the seeds of a difficult conflict to come at the time of separation from France.

From 1830 the French army gradually extended its hold over the Algerian land mass, confiscating property and land from the Arab-Berber inhabitants. The official occupation of the land started after the defeat of Abd El Kader who had successfully resisted the French until 1847.

In 1848, the law of 23 September offering settlers 12 ha plots and a grant of 50 million Francs was voted towards the creation of 'centres of colonisation', fulfilling Bugeaud's pledge in 1842.<sup>20</sup>

A whole procedure was engineered to make land available. Confiscation of lands became the standard punishment whenever any natives took up arms against France or proved to be hostile to the settlers. This spiralled into a vicious circle: Arab-Berber peasants revolted against the loss of their livelihood and savage reprisals were followed by the confiscation of the land of the rebellious tribes. Fresh legal means were provided to allow the occupation of the land: the *Senatus Consulte* in 1863 and the *Loi Warnier* in 1878. In 1851 all 'uncultivated' land (2 400 000 ha) had become the property of the state.<sup>21</sup> After the Kabyle insurrection of 1871 (under the leadership of El Mokrani) and its defeat by the French army, severe reprisals were accompanied with the confiscation of around 500 000 ha of land.<sup>22</sup> Altogether it was a gigantic enterprise of expropriation and spoliation.

From 1871 to 1900, according to Abdalla Laroui, 687 000 ha were given to the settlers. From 1880 to 1908 another 450 000 ha came into the settlers' hands.<sup>23</sup> The Second Empire started to encourage big enterprises and exports of capital: vast domains were conceded to the *Compagnie Genevoise* (200 000 ha), the *Société Générale Algérienne* (100 000 ha of the Constantinois forests) the *Société de l'Habra* (160 000 ha) and de la *Macta* (25 000 ha of cork oaks).<sup>24</sup> In areas requiring heavy investment commitments, state funds helped to guarantee expansion. French railway companies built a network of 1375 km from 1857 to 1881.<sup>25</sup>

Laroui shows how big banks started to control the distri-

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bution and sometimes the production of industrial cultures from 1851 (la Banque d'Algérie). Algeria became a thriving lucrative colony attracting capital investments in agriculture and extraction industries from both state and private funds.

The character of agriculture had changed since the French settlers had moved in. Agricultural land had been diverted from its original vocation; wheat as a first large-scale agricultural product gave way to vineyards after 1880. This viticulture was only in the interests of the settlers at the expense of the Arab-Berber population's much needed wheat. The phylloxera crisis in France led to the expansion of Algerian wine production. While vineyards occupied 15 000 ha of land in 1878, in 1936 they covered 400 000 ha and wine production increased from 9.73 million hl in 1924 to 19.3 million hl in 1954.<sup>26</sup> Algerian wine was produced for export: in 1953, out of 18 million hl, 16 million hl were exported to France.<sup>27</sup> The French owners were largely the beneficiaries of this land revolution. The best lands had been devoted to new viticulture of which 90 per cent were in the hands of Europeans.<sup>28</sup>

Small properties gradually diminished, the influx of capital concentrating the land into big latifundia. Six per cent of owners held more than half the vineyards,<sup>29</sup> so that the number of small settlers decreased. Most of them had migrated to the towns where they found work.

As for industry, it was limited to extraction industries for export, in the hands of few enterprises; for instance, the Ouenza Company, which began in 1921, controlled 78 per cent of Algerian iron ores.<sup>30</sup>

How did Algeria fare economically in its exchanges with other countries? Hubert Deschamps had remarked that Algeria was the only new colony to be 'assimilated' economically, the law of January 1851 allowing Algerian products into France free of duties.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Tunisia, Morocco or Madagascar, Algeria 'benefited' from a Union Douanière (one single custom area) with France, as a result of which she lost 8 million Francs every year because French prices were above world prices. The same products bought from other countries would have been much cheaper. Algeria imported food and manufactured products, machines and building material from France and exported mainly agricultural products (86 per cent of exports in 1952), together with raw materials (10.6 per cent). Colette and

Francis Jeanson underlined the very close economic links between France and Algeria.<sup>32</sup> Algeria was France's best customer: 11 per cent of France's exports were shipped to Algeria – mostly manufactured goods, electric goods, cars, etc. – 7.1 per cent to West Germany, and 5.4 per cent to Great Britain. Algerian imports into France came third (7.3 per cent of all imports) after the USA (9.3 per cent) and West Germany (7.6 per cent). The commerce between Algeria and other countries was decreasing while France provided 73.6 per cent of its imports and received 70 per cent of its exports. The adverse balance of Algerian finances had to be regularly redressed by French state funds. However, there is one thing which these few figures make absolutely clear: the fact that the whole way of life and standard of living of the settlers was subordinated to the continuation of Algeria's close relationship with France.

### **Settlers and *Indigènes***

This very brief survey of the judicial and economic history of Algeria would not present an accurate picture without some consideration being given to the distribution of its population.

The census of October 1954 revealed 1 042 500 'non-Muslims' (983 100 French citizens of which 50 per cent were of non-French origin) and 8 484 000 Muslims (i.e. Arab-Berbers), the sum total of the Algerian population numbering 9 526 000 inhabitants.<sup>33</sup> Unlike other French colonies, Algeria was the home of an important contingent of European settlers who came in successive waves. Initially the French government made it a policy to encourage the growth of this population. Many of them were of non-French stock: from Spain, Italy or Malta. The French government passed laws<sup>34</sup> in an effort to increase the number of French settlers in order to reduce the disproportion between the native population and the settlers' group to no avail; the imbalance remained. The two groups stood face to face and the discrepancy between them was on the increase. The numbers of French settlers rapidly stagnated whereas the Arab-Berber population was the subject of a galloping birth rate: it doubled between 1901 and 1951 to around 8 million.<sup>35</sup>

There was no parity in their standard of living as is revealed by their respective incomes, averaging 60 000 Fr per month

for a 'French' Algerian against 25 000 Fr per year for a 'Muslim'.<sup>36</sup> The settlers were greatly advantaged by the distribution of land; they had been given the best lands. Meanwhile, the majority of Arab-Berbers were below the bread line.<sup>37</sup> General Bugeaud had argued that settlers must be placed 'wherever there are fertile lands and good water without ascertaining whom they belonged to'.<sup>38</sup>

Only 47.3 per cent of the surface of Algeria remained in the hands of the Arab-Berbers.<sup>39</sup> Whilst the settlers' land could be irrigated easily, 75 per cent of Muslim lands could not accommodate any equipment and yielded very poor crops.<sup>40</sup> According to André Nouschi<sup>41</sup> one hectare of land yielded 34 000 Fr for a settler against 6 400 fr for a *fellah* (peasant in Algerian dialect).

On the political plane the same imbalance existed. The settlers maintained the upper hand; even the very limited degree of Arab-Berber participation in political life was rendered null and void by the inequity of the supposedly democratic channels. These were further discredited by electoral manipulations which installed bogus representatives in the pay of the French settlers' interests.

Inequality of rights between *indigènes* and settlers was official; the *code de l'indigénat* imposed all kinds of restrictions on Muslims. They could be imprisoned without trial, there were no provisions for the protection of employment where natives were concerned and no right to organise. Salaries for the same amount and type of work were lower for natives and the possibilities of promotion were very slim if not totally absent. Access to the civil service, for instance, was practically barred to Arab-Berbers: out of 2000 civil servants in Algeria there were eight Arab-Berbers.<sup>42</sup> Unemployment did not affect the settlers at all, whilst it was a permanent feature among the *indigènes*; Larbi Bouhali estimated 1 500 000 unemployed, without counting the 400 000 Arab-Berbers who emigrated to France in order to seek employment.<sup>43</sup>

Social laws barely touched the Muslim population, whereas the settlers enjoyed full social benefits on a par with their compatriots in the mother country. For example, there was no family allowance for the *indigènes* working on the land, i.e. the vast majority of them, and only restricted allowances for others. If they were sick, sickness benefits would only be paid on the

eleventh day, and only salaried workers had a pension (i.e. a tiny minority of them).<sup>44</sup>

These are only a few instances of the inequity of treatment; it is little wonder that the ground was laid for an open confrontation. As Germaine Tillion has shown, not only were the Arab-Berber inhabitants reduced to below the bread line, they were constantly forced to witness the opulence displayed by the settlers' way of life.<sup>45</sup>

From the point of view of the non-French settlers, the assimilation process had been a complete success. Schooling and military service had transformed them into 'good' Frenchmen. Soon there was little trace left of the Spanish or Italian separate communities. They merged into the Algerian *pieds noirs* (French born in Algeria) who believed that France was their motherland. The situation for the Arab-Berber group was very different. Having broken up its traditional society, as has been shown by Abdallah Laroui,<sup>46</sup> French colonisation failed to operate a cultural remoulding of the native population. Despite its claims to fulfilling a 'civilising mission', the penetration of French culture did not reach beyond a few individuals. On the contrary the whole process could have been renamed 'decivilisation'. If we take the example of education, the French occupation did not have very positive results. In 1830, there was less illiteracy in Algeria than in France<sup>47</sup> (over 40 per cent in France).

In 1957, Germaine Tillion assesses illiteracy in Algeria was 94 per cent for men, 98 per cent for women among the Arab-Berbers.<sup>48</sup> Just before the war (1954–62) Charles-André Julien found that only 110 000 out of 1 250 000 children between 6 and 14 years of age attended French schools.<sup>49</sup> Access to higher education was even more limited for Arab-Berbers. At university level there was one student out of 227 European Algerians, and one student for 15 342 Muslim inhabitants.<sup>50</sup>

The cultural oppression, the closure of Islamic schools which existed in most villages, control of the Islamic clergy by the French administration despite the 1905 law on the separation of the Church and the State, failed to eradicate Islam or the Arabic language, but drove the *indigènes* to withdraw into their own culture. Racism institutionalised by all the discriminatory laws was prevalent among the settlers who did not hesitate to

assert the inferiority of the Arab-Berber population. These were treated as sub-humans by the settlers.

The situation in Algeria and its relationship to France have to be considered from a triangular point of view. It is not sufficient to study the two poles of the axis: France versus Algeria, imperialist *métropole* and colony. The problem is further complicated by the special status of a substantial population of French settlers. Although the colonial nature of Algeria remains at the heart of a fundamental understanding of the contradictions, the most acute conflicts manifested themselves at the level of French settler and Arab-Berber relationships. France could not extricate itself from the ambiguity in its policy towards Algeria. The French government had been professing a policy of assimilation claiming that Algeria was part of France; the settlers benefited from it since they were truly 'assimilated'. But the double standard applied to the respective populations left no doubt about the hypocrisy of an assimilation that applied solely to Europeans. Arab-Berbers remained colonials, but in a worse situation perhaps than other colonised peoples elsewhere, because of the settlers' presence. Even when the French government attempted improvements for Arab-Berbers, if they were pressurised to do so by circumstances, the settlers would raise hurdles of all kinds to hamper the implementation of these reforms. The Arab-Berbers lost faith in the finding of a peaceful solution to the problem, after they had tried in vain to use democratic channels. Violence presented itself as the reliable option. It would then be difficult to untie such a Gordian knot.

## THE ALGERIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

A survey of the relationship between Algeria and France would not be complete without examining the Algerian national movement. The birth and consolidation of the Algerian nation can be observed through the development of the national liberation struggle. Nationalism and national demands are part and parcel of the national phenomena; they provide us with a gauge of 'national maturity' in Algeria.

Mostefa Lacheraf divided into three periods the collective



reaction of the Algerian native population to the French occupation.<sup>51</sup>

1. A first period which witnessed recurrent armed rebellions lasting from the beginning of the conquest under the leadership of Abd El Kader till El Mokrani's attempt in 1871.
2. In a second stage the people's active resistance appears to have relatively subsided.
3. From 1920 onwards, the Algerian movement awakened under new forms. This latter phase is the one we shall concentrate on.

The first personality to come to the fore was the Emir Khaled who benefited from the 1919 law brought in by Clémenceau and who won the municipal election on the '*indigène* list' in the spring of 1920. This election was to be declared void by the administration but Khaled's success had born witness to the support which Algerian Muslims gave to his programme. Khaled, a captain in the French army and grandson of Abd El Kader, was taking up and developing demands first formulated by the Mouvement Jeune Algérie in 1912; those demands were essentially assimilationist.

The interpretation of Khaled's historical significance remains controversial. André Nouschi includes him in his chapter '*Les débuts du nationalisme*'.<sup>52</sup> Charles-André Julien first called him 'the true precursor of nationalism'<sup>53</sup> but subsequently qualified his statement to support Mostefa Lacheraf's interpretation of Khaled as part of the movement for assimilation.<sup>54</sup> However, he is generally identified as a signpost of the Algerian people's national awakening.

From the twenties Algerian organisations were to grow in numbers and strength without any major interruption. The movement naturally did not follow a straight line upwards as it suffered setbacks, mainly as a result of colonial repression. As a whole the audience for national demands increased steadily among the Algerian people. Two trends ran parallel to each other: the one striving for assimilation and the other calling for a separate Algerian entity. The Second World War and the Sétif events followed by the stubborn refusal of reforms on the part of the settlers definitely defeated the advocates of assimilation. The national movement then reached a point of no return.

For a brief account of the national movement, one can retain three important names epitomising the thirties and the first developments of Algerian national consciousness: Ferhat Abbas,\* Sheikh Ben Badis\* and Messali Hadj\*.

1. Ferhat Abbas represented the trend of the *Évolués*, modern Arab-Berber élites who later formed the *Fédération des Elus\** in Algeria; it criticised the French policy and praised Moslem civilisation and dignity without promoting a break with France. In his *Recueil d'études*, written between 1921 and 1930, Ferhat Abbas asked for the gradual integration of the Algerian native élite 'in the French City'; in 1936 he denied the accusation of 'nationalist' levelled against him in an article which was to become famous: 'If I had discovered the "Algerian nation", I would be nationalist . . . However, I shall not die for the Algerian motherland because this motherland does not exist.'<sup>55</sup>

Ferhat Abbas's declaration clearly expressed an assimilationist opinion rather than an acute Algerian national consciousness. It is all the more striking in the light of his subsequent political options, which became more and more radicalised. He eventually became the first president of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) in 1958.

2. Sheikh Ben Badis, after creating a Muslim intellectual brotherhood and two monthly reviews, emerged as the leader of the *Association des Oulema\** (Muslim scholars), set up in 1931. They set up new Koranic schools which were powerful cultural and religious instruments. Striving for a regeneration of Islamic purity they glorified the Algerian and North African past in order to enhance all aspects of the Algerian identity. Their ideology is best expressed by Tewfik El Madani\*, one of the prominent *oulema*, who declared: 'Islam is my religion, Arabic my language, Algeria my motherland.'<sup>56</sup>

Although the *oulema* only moderately advocated independence 'under the leadership of France', they were adamant on the question of the Algerian national character. It is Ben Badis who forcefully refuted Ferhat Abbas: 'The Muslim Algerian nation has been formed and it exists . . . This Algerian nation is not France, cannot be France and does

not want to be France.<sup>57</sup>

The *oulema* influenced important sections of the Algerian Arab-Berbers who were deeply wrapped in Islam. The *medersa* (Koranic schools) created by the *oulema* acted as efficient schools of nationalism; Charles-Robert Ageron counted 40,000 students attending those schools by 1954.<sup>58</sup>

3. A third protagonist arose in the same period, furthering the most radical demands: Messali Hadj, who asked for nothing short of independence for Algeria. He was the leading figure of the Étoile Nord Africaine\* (ENA) founded in 1926. The ENA was especially influential among Algerian workers in France; encouraged and supported by the PCF, it enjoyed a working-class base and included in its programme social as well as national demands.<sup>59</sup> After it fell under a banning order from the French authorities, it reappeared as Parti du Peuple Algérien\* (PPA) in 1937.

A definite Algerian awareness was thus being stirred up during the twenties and thirties, despite the lack of organisational unity in Algeria. From the mid-twenties throughout the years leading up to the Popular Front, the Communist Party in Algeria, which was a branch of the PCF until 1936, took upon itself the task of promoting the slogan of independence, in accordance with the programme of the Communist International concerning the colonies. After 1936, the newly formed Parti Communiste Algérien (PCA) advocated 'Union with Democratic France' in view of the fascist threat. Both France and Algerian communist parties adopted the same line on that issue.

All these organisations converged in an effort to attain some unity: the Congrès Musulman was convened in 1936, comprising all the political trends: Ferhat Abbas and the *évolués*, the *oulema*, the Étoile Nord Africaine and the Algerian Communist Party. A '*charte revendicative du peuple algérien musulman*' (a reclamation charter from the Muslim Algerian people) emerged from it which was to be presented to the French government. It was the last significant attempt towards a 'policy of union with France'<sup>60</sup> to be widely representative among Algerian national organisations. Its platform included economic and political demands but all were to be achieved within the French framework. The Etoile Nord Africaine criticised it and was

expelled at the second congress. At all events, the Congrès Musulman was dealt a blow by the abortion of all the expected reforms encompassed in the Blum-Violette project bringing about widespread disillusionment and shaking the unstable unity of its ranks. The hope or possibility of improvements under French tutelage had been shattered, except in the eyes of the Algerian Communist Party.

For all the other organisations a page had been turned and the trend favouring an Algerian identity separate from France set in as the prevailing one. The Second World War merely accentuated this tendency. The most spectacular conversion was that of Ferhat Abbas, who had so dramatically denied the existence of the Algerian nation a few years previously and who now became the chief artisan of the *Manifeste du peuple algérien*, which denounced the colonial system (at the beginning of 1943). An addition to the *Manifeste* presented a detailed political programme to the French authorities to no avail.<sup>61</sup> This *Manifeste* is defined by Charles-André Julien as 'the beginning of a new era of nationalist action'.<sup>62</sup> From then on the nationalist voice rallied round radical demands which increased proportionately to the repression inflicted by the colonial power.

In 1944 an *Association des Amis du Manifeste\** was formed comprising Ferhat Abbas, the clandestine *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (Messali Hadj's organisation) and the *oulema*, thus grouping together the three main streams of the nationalist movement. In March 1945, the first congress of the *Amis du Manifeste*, which counted 350 000 members,<sup>63</sup> decided against an autonomous republic federated with France and in favour of an Algerian Parliament and government.

The hardship of the war situation had certainly aggravated the Algerian masses. And throughout the Arab world the pan-Arab movement was thriving. Even if no direct link was established between the pan-Arab movement and the *Amis du Manifeste*, the general atmosphere in Algeria must have been impressed by this oriental wind.

Nationalist sentiment was running high and the ray of hope left to advocates of participation with France and assimilation was extinguished by the terrible Sétif reprisals in 1945, followed by a systematic repression. Even the democratic channels became closed to Algerian organisations because of the general-

ised electoral fraud orchestrated by the French authorities to instal their yes-men.

It is interesting to note that the Parti Communiste Algérien had not participated in the Congrès des Amis du Manifeste. Neither was its French opposite number, the PCF, favourable to it. Both continued to advocate for Algeria a close association with 'democratic France', for strategic reasons pertaining mainly to the world and the French situation. In its 1946 congress the PCA took note of Ferhat Abbas's electoral success as its newly founded party the Union Démocratique du Manifeste Algérien\* gained 458 000 out of 633 000 votes while the PCA only had 53 396 votes.<sup>64</sup> The PCA explained its own failure as the result of its underestimation of the national movement, which portrayed the PCA as a 'non-Algerian party' to the electors. It renounced the assimilation doctrine in July 1946 and asked for an Algerian Assembly and government. However, the PCA was unable to put forward a decisive programme which could appeal to the Arab-Berber masses. The leap taken by Algerian nationalism had left the PCA behind; its hesitations and its emphasis on 'association' with France prevented it from acquiring any real influence among the Arab-Berber population.

The nationalist organisations themselves proved unable to budge the shackles of French rule. All their demands, including moderate ones, had been rebuffed; the 1947 Statute, which nationalist organisations had considered as an insult because it granted so little, was not even implemented. The situation was explosive and the radicalisation of the movement did not seem to reap concrete results. The remainder of the years leading up to the 1954 insurrection witnessed unsuccessful attempts at unity of action between the various Algerian organisations. Being divided among themselves and within their own ranks, they showed their incapacity to respond to the pressing needs of the situation.

'Le Nationalisme bloqué' (nationalism in deadlock) is how Claude Collot and Jean-Robert Henry<sup>65</sup> described the Algerian situation on the eve of 1954. Unity was realised through the armed struggle launched by the CRUA-FLN, the Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action\* founded the Front de Libération Nationale in 1954. The rapid success of this action rallying the support of the population for Algerian indepen-

dence, and of all the other organisations but one (Messali Hadj's movement from which the CRUA came), leaves no doubt about the intensity of national feelings in Algeria.

The ground for the Algerian national insurrection had been prepared by three decades of increasingly assertive nationalist agitation combined with France's stubborn resistance to any measure of change.

The post First World War period witnessed a steady progression of Algerian national consciousness. The first Arab-Berber interventions on the political scene expressed themselves in terms of assimilationist demands. These gradually gave way to a more radical programme. The first mentors of the movement, Ferhat Abbas and the *oulema*, stressed more and more the separate identity of Algeria as a Muslim Arab-Berber community. They eventually joined Messali Hadj's assertive claim for Algerian independence. The Second World War makes a turning point for Algerian nationalism amongst nationalist organisations and the Arab-Berber masses. From 1945 the general exacerbation of nationalist feelings urged for a solution which was to be found in the 1 November 1954 explosion.

The Communist Party in Algeria appears to have followed an inverse itinerary. From the mid-twenties, the PCF Algerian 'region' adopted a radical policy, despite the difficulties it encountered from its own members (all of them being settlers to begin with) and the repression from the French administration. Its programme for the decolonisation and independence of Algeria, for the recruitment of Arab-Berbers – a process called 'arabisation' – and for the cooperation with nationalist organisations,<sup>66</sup> lasted a decade. At that time Arab-Berber Algerian nationalism was only taking shape, still oscillating between an assimilationist and a 'separatist' trend.

For a brief interval (in 1935) virulent anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism were brandished on a par with anti-fascism.<sup>67</sup> Thereafter the new strategy of the PCF Algerian 'region' and the PCA (created in October 1936) played down its anti-colonialist propaganda from 1936 onwards. The slogan of Algerian independence gave way to 'fraternal union' between French and Algerian people,<sup>68</sup> between Algeria and democratic France against the threat of fascism. This was also the policy

of the PCF in the mother country. It seems logical that the same theme persisted throughout the Second World War.

In 1946, the PCA held out a friendly hand to nationalist organisations and radicalised its demands but did not subscribe to a policy of independence for Algeria; instead it proposed that Algeria should become an Associate Territory in the French Union.<sup>69</sup> Despite its efforts to achieve some unity with the main nationalist organisations, the PCA's sincerity remained doubtful in the eyes of nationalists and the Arab-Berber masses.<sup>70</sup> Its links with the PCF and its prudence when it came to Algerian independence (the PCA preferred autonomy) and the existence of an Algerian nation (the PCA, following Maurice Thorez's formula, liked to see it as a 'nation in formation') did not help to dispel the accusation of '*parti roumi*' (in Algerian dialect Christian or French) levelled at the PCA by the Arab-Berbers.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, the PCA failed to keep up with an overwhelming Algerian nationalism and played a very marginal role in the Algerian national liberation movement.

## 2 The PCF and the Colonial Question: A Historical Perspective

### ANTI-COLONIALISM AND THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT BEFORE 1920

Anti-colonialism in France did not really begin with the Left. Charles-Robert Ageron, in *L'anti-colonialisme en France de 1871 à 1914*,<sup>1</sup> shows how the main 'anti-colonialist' trends in the nineteenth century comprised mainly non-socialist movements. Liberal economists who promoted free trade saw in colonialism an extension of protectionism.<sup>2</sup> They also objected to the losses in productive investments in France caused by various expenses in the colonies. These arguments were often accompanied by humanist, moral reasons, stigmatising the crimes of colonial conquests.

Republican anti-colonialism expressed itself mostly through the radicals who condemned the policy of conquest and adventure in their programme of 1881 and in the Radical Manifesto (1885).<sup>3</sup> Clemenceau brilliantly opposed Jules Ferry's colonial policy in his speech to the Assembly on 31 July 1885 declaring 'my patriotism resides in France'.<sup>4</sup>

In 1884, he had also argued that the diversion of French military strength to the colonies was playing into the hands of Bismarck.<sup>5</sup>

After 1885, more and more radicals rallied to the 'colonial camp' and from 1907 the majority of the Radical Party had been won over to a colonialist policy.<sup>6</sup>

The Socialists' arguments against colonialism did not differ fundamentally from those of the Radicals. The Socialists, while denouncing military expeditions in the colonies and the profiteering that ensured, also opposed the loss of French soldiers' lives and the crimes of colonialism against defenceless populations. Some, like Vaillant, took up the anti-Bismarck argument.<sup>7</sup> Jules Guesdes' Party, the Parti Ouvrier Français (POF), to an extent used a 'class' phraseology to condemn colonialism,



arguing that it enriched 'capitalist' France to the detriment of the proletariat at the Congrès de Romilly (in 1895). One of the POF's prime concerns was the death of French soldiers in the 'slaughter-houses' of Tonkin and Madagascar.<sup>8</sup>

According to Paul Louis, who became the mouthpiece of anti-colonialism, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFI0), colonialism resulted from over-production and engendered greater over-production. The colonies provided outlets and money in the capitalist mother country and were a source of riches, but colonialism also caused more poverty and unemployment whilst creating an increased number of enemies, the 'proletarianised' natives. Paul Louis remained a consistent anti-colonialist after numerous other socialists vacillated and came to envisage colonialism as a vehicle of civilisation.<sup>9</sup>

Among the anti-colonialists, Jean Jaurès must be cited, though a few words cannot suffice to describe the evolution of his position on the colonial question.<sup>10</sup> The main grounds sustaining Jaurès's policy towards colonialism were humanism and pacifism. Jaurès virulently reprovved and denounced the atrocities committed by colonialist adventures, but he did not object to all forms of colonialism, which, in his eyes, could become a civilising tool if conducted peacefully. As the First World War approached Jaurès's anti-colonialism hardened because he identified colonial rivalries as important factors of war.

However, in France, as in the rest of Europe, there was no unanimous opinion concerning colonialism in the socialist movement. The French socialist movement reflected the trends to be found in the international socialist movement at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Socialists often opposed colonialism for a variety of reasons: pacifism, anti-militarism, humanitarianism or simply because it provided a good platform to expose the corruption of governments in power. Others were not so hostile to colonialism, and many changed their position within the space of a few years. Some were even in favour of colonialism. On the whole there was great confusion on the question.

In his analysis of imperialism, Lenin spelled out anti-colonialism clearly and established the theoretical foundations for an anti-colonialist approach.<sup>11</sup>

The debates on colonialism within the Second International revealed confused and divergent opinions. The first congresses of the Second International hardly mention the colonial question. Its Fifth Congress in Paris (1900) included it in its agenda, condemning colonialism and deciding on the creation of socialist parties in the colonies.<sup>12</sup> The Amsterdam congress (1904), which eventually adopted an anti-colonialist stance, nonetheless disclosed a strong tendency in favour of colonialism among its delegates: the Dutch delegate Van Kol spoke for a 'social' colonial policy because socialist society would need colonies in order better to expand economically, adding that the earth and its riches in any case belonged to the whole of mankind.<sup>13</sup>

The following congress (Stuttgart, 1907) displayed similar trends. David took up the line presented by Van Kol in Amsterdam.<sup>14</sup> Terwagne and Rouanet (a French delegate)<sup>15</sup> supported his position, the former noting the 'civilising' impact of colonialism on 'backward' peoples, the latter underlining the advantages of 'vast colonial surfaces' for European peoples, which could benefit the economies of their countries.<sup>16</sup> Van Kol demonstrated the need of colonies for surplus population and overproduction in the metropolitan country; he went as far as to propose the use of arms to conquer colonies, against the 'cannibalism' of the natives.<sup>17</sup> At Stuttgart the commission in charge of the colonial question had proposed a motion which did not condemn colonialism 'which in a socialist regime could take the form of a mission to civilise'.<sup>18</sup> The congress as a whole reversed this resolution, after a heated debate.

Any recognition of the principle of a colonial policy would amount to supporting the bourgeois system, said Lenin in his comments on the Stuttgart congress.<sup>19</sup> Lenin saw in the vote (108 votes for the colonial commission proposal, 128 against) an indication of the 'contamination' of the European proletariat in countries where the passion of conquest prevailed. The votes of 'small nations' saved the day, outnumbering delegates from big nations possessing an empire.

The colonial question was intimately linked with the issue of imperialism. The International Socialist Bureau planned a 'thorough examination of the economic, social and political aspects of contemporary capitalist society'<sup>20</sup> and placed it on the agenda of the forthcoming Vienna Congress of the Second

International. The preparatory debate brought out one prevailing opinion: the idea that imperialism diminished the menace of world war. This point of view was shared by many socialist theoreticians, although they reached this conclusion through different paths. For Kautsky, imperialism was not an economic system but a policy of capitalism to annex agrarian territories. In his eyes, monopoly associations in different countries, concentrated on an international scale, lessened contradictions between countries; this 'ultra-imperialism' produced a peaceful crisisless phase of capitalism.<sup>21</sup> Hilferding saw in imperialism an 'organised' form of capitalism. International trusts signified that competition gave way to a planned economy which could even peacefully grow into socialism.<sup>22</sup>

Haase declared that capitalism's aggressive tendencies were becoming blunted, thanks to the collaboration between British and German capital on the world market, compounded with the solidarity of the proletariat in different countries.<sup>23</sup>

Only some elements of the extreme left such as Pennekoek retained a pessimistic view of imperialism, for engendering the armament race as an inevitable and economically necessary phenomenon.<sup>24</sup>

Vliegen (the Dutch *rapporteur* to the International) summarised the general view on imperialism: according to him, the developments of modern capitalism contributed to alleviate rather than exacerbate existing antagonisms. He noted a trend towards peace among the ruling classes themselves and saw the fact that the division of the world had been completed as a guarantee of the stability of the world situation.<sup>25</sup>

Lenin did not directly participate in the debate at the time but he wrote ample comments on others' writings, refuting what he considered to be dangerous errors of analysis. For Lenin the very nature of imperialism provided the basis for a definite position on the colonial question. He defined imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. In his view, with the coming of imperialism, competition gives way to monopoly, the merging of banking and industrial capitals produce monopoly finance capital, export of capital assumes particular importance and the division of the world between great powers is completed. Violent competition between monopolies and the uneven development of capitalism lead to a war for a redistribution of territories between the great powers.<sup>26</sup> Thus the colon-

ies represented an important reserve and a source of strength for imperialism providing an outlet for capital, abundant raw materials and a cheap labour force. The struggle of colonial peoples which threatened this reserve of power undermined imperialism and ought to be supported for that reason, argued Lenin. After the 1917 October revolution, Lenin established even more clearly the necessary alliance between the proletarian revolution and the national liberation movements in the colonies which shared the same enemy: imperialism.

The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus – the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.<sup>27</sup>

A lengthy exposé would be required to describe the evolution of socialist opinion on the colonial question. The few paragraphs above make it clear that a great number of socialists were not hostile to colonialism and envisaged it as a useful instrument of progress; imbued with their 'European' consciousness and the belief in the superiority of their civilisation, they welcomed the supposedly beneficial influence of imperialist penetration in tribal or feudal territories, in a nutshell 'backward' cultures. Even Kautsky, who was indignant at Bernstein's pro-colonialist stance, accepted the positive 'civilising' aspect of colonialism under the condition that it was not aggressive and carried out forcibly.<sup>28</sup> The 'old' French socialist leaders such as Jaurès and Vaillant did not reject colonialism altogether. Very few did. And none of them did so on the basis of a solid analysis of imperialism. Contradictions and confusion were bound to persist in the world and French socialist movements even after the creation of the Third International. The history of the French Party's line on colonialism after it joined the Third International gives a good illustration of the problem.

## THE PCF AND COLONIALISM

Opposing the 'Europeocentrism' of Second Internationalists, Lenin had insisted on the importance of the colonies' anti-imperialist movements. In his 1920 theses he clearly recommended that communists cooperate with bourgeois democratic movements in the colonies.<sup>29</sup> The colonial question undoubtedly occupied an important place in Leninism; Lenin's analysis of imperialism had brought its significance to light. Naturally, the Third International, 'Lenin's International',<sup>30</sup> demanded that all its national sections adopt the same Leninist approach to the colonial movements.

### The Tours Congress

In December 1920 at Tours, the 18th congress of the Parti Socialiste Unifié became the founding congress of the Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste, or Parti Communiste Français. It is alleged that many delegates had not read the 21 conditions which had to be accepted before the Party could join the Third International. Some of these conditions were not specifically referred to at the Tours Congress in so far as the Comité de la Troisième Internationale did not put forward resolutions relating to all the 21 conditions. However, some evidence suggests that a number of delegates had read the 21 conditions. Paul Faure in his speech proceeded to analyse 'in [his] opinion the most important ones of these conditions'.<sup>31</sup> He also mentioned a 'red book . . . to be found on all the seats of this congress. I mean the book entitled *Statutes and Resolutions of the Communist International*'<sup>32</sup> which contained the 21 conditions. Those were therefore available to the attention of delegates.

The 8th condition dealt with the question of colonies:

A particularly explicit and clear attitude on the question of the colonies and the oppressed peoples is necessary for the parties in those countries where the bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations. Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obliged to expose the tricks and dodges of 'its' imperialists in the colonies, to support every colonial liberation movement not merely in

words but in deeds, to demand the expulsion of their own imperialists from these colonies, to inculcate among the workers of their country a genuinely fraternal attitude to the working people of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and to carry on systematic agitation among the troops of their country against any oppression of the colonial peoples.<sup>33</sup>

The 8th condition did not leave a shadow of doubt as to the tasks facing the Parties belonging to the Third International, whose bourgeoisie possessed colonies. After stressing the need for clear-cut conduct on the part of those parties, it stressed their duty to expose 'ruthlessly' the feats of their 'own' imperialists in the colonies, to support, not only in words but in deeds, all emancipation movements in the colonies, and eventually they must demand the 'expulsion' of imperialists from the colonies. The formulation of the 8th condition was extremely forceful, and one could perhaps infer from it that a great deal of ideological work had to be done in this field among Parties in the 'imperialist' countries. In addition the 8th condition demanded 'a continued agitation' against colonial oppression among the troops of the mother country, proving that it really intended action in favour of the peoples of the colonies and not only slogans.

Three motions were presented at the Tours Congress on the colonial question. The Comité de la Troisième Internationale and the fraction Cachin-Frossard, whilst endorsing the Third International line, proposed a milder version than the 8th condition.<sup>34</sup> Exposing imperialism was retained in the resolution and an 'active' support for oppressed peoples whatever their form of struggle remained, indicating that the Party did not qualify its support for colonised peoples. In this sense the resolution of the Third International supporters at Tours remained faithful to the spirit of the 8th condition. Nonetheless the virulent tone against imperialism had been dropped. The Resolution did not explicitly demand the expulsion of French imperialism from its colonies and failed to pledge agitation in the army against colonial oppression. This moderation in attacking French colonialism betrays a certain lack of commitment or boldness on the part of members who were the very proponents of the Third International in France. They did not venture to be too offensive against French imperialism. Two

possible explanations could account for their hesitation: either they did not clearly understand and accept the 8th condition or they knew of a potentially strong opposition to the 8th condition within the Party. Both explanations forecast future difficulties for the Party on that issue.

The other two resolutions were in the main similar in what they did not state. They did not denounce imperialism and colonialism, as did the Comité de la Troisième Internationale and the 8th condition. They also failed to offer a total support to the struggle of colonised peoples. Both qualified that support. The Comité pour la Reconstruction de l'Internationale excluded war from the acceptable means of support.<sup>35</sup> The Comité de Résistance Socialiste more clearly opposed the 8th condition.<sup>36</sup> It proposed simply to pursue the policy of the Second International on colonies 'as it has always done so' indicating that no change was planned, least of all a clean break with the Second International which was what the Third International asked for. It also rejected essential aspects of the 8th condition: 'But it refuses to confuse the movement of revolt of oppressed peoples with the task of proletarian liberation; it cannot accept a propaganda which would tend to warp the class struggle and unleash a race war equally contrary to its principles of fraternity and peace.'<sup>37</sup>

The analysis underlying the above statement deserves examining as it will reappear more than once within the ranks of the PCF. The Comité de Résistance Socialiste derived its conclusions from a rather mechanistic class approach and a 'Europeocentric' outlook. The answer to the colonial problem for it lay in the class struggle in the mother country: proletariat versus bourgeoisie. The colonised peoples considered by the Second Internationalists as more backward would receive their deliverance from the advent of socialism in the mother country. In the meantime their society was seen as less advanced than the French one; some were tribal or feudal, whereas France was one mode of production ahead: capitalist. To support the liberation movements in the colonies was therefore construed by some socialists as a step towards regression, leading perhaps to a return to feudalism. It was inconceivable in the eyes of those socialists that the proletariat (from the 'mother country') supported movements comprising tribal, feudal and bourgeois forces, often led by the nascent colonised bourgeoisie. This line

was diametrically opposed to the Leninist analysis of the colonial movements for emancipation according to which the real class dimension of the issue placed the proletariat of the imperialist country and the liberation movements in the colonies in the same camp fighting a common enemy: imperialism. Hence the duty of Communist Parties to demand the 'expulsion' of imperialists from the colonies as was stated in the 8th condition.

The motion of the Comité de la Troisième Internationale and the fraction Cachin-Frossard won the day in Tours by 3208 votes (plus 44 from the Leroy proposal). Only 1022 votes went to the Comité pour la Reconstruction de l'Internationale.<sup>38</sup> This result meant that the newly formed PCF was bound to implement the 8th condition. In practice, no unanimity had been reached on the issue, no debate had enabled the differing views to be voiced in the open. The Algerian Federations which in their majority (34 out of 41) voted in favour of joining the Third International, disagreed with the 8th condition and supported the other motions.<sup>39</sup> According to Charles-André Julien, their delegate, the arrival of a telegram from Zinoviev aborted the exposé his mandatories had asked him to present.<sup>40</sup> Somehow a number of Party members were under the illusion that a measure of flexibility would be possible in the interpretation of the 8th condition. As a whole the Party had still to undergo a painful process of 'bolshevisation', which required a fundamental reappraisal of its political, tactical and organisational lines. It had just commenced its metamorphosis; for a long time to come the old trends and differences were to be carried through. Lenin himself quoted the example of the French party to demonstrate the difficulties involved in the transformation of a party of the old parliamentary type into a party of a new type.<sup>41</sup>

The colonial question did not rank among the priorities of the PCF, and the recommendations of the Third International on this question were slow to get under way. A Comité d'Etudes Coloniales was created at the end of August 1921 which was in charge of preparing a report and a resolution for the Marseille congress of the PCF in December 1921. The congress did not discuss the colonial question and merely ratified the creation of the Comité d'Etudes Coloniales. The lack of concern for the colonies on the part of communist parties



already drew the attention of the Third International which invited them to 'organise a methodical campaign in the press, in Parliament and among the masses for the liberation of colonies'.<sup>42</sup>

*L'Humanité*, at the beginning of 1921 (7 January), had published the views of North African communists who opposed the liberation of the colonies on account of the natives' 'backwardness'. This point of view continued to be allowed in Party publications.<sup>43</sup> Vaillant-Couturier, who belonged to the Comité d'Etudes Coloniales, initiated a series of articles in *l'Humanité* on French imperialism in Algeria. He thereby intended to expose colonial oppression. Despite a sincere attempt to bring the colonial question to the attention of communists Vaillant-Couturier himself subordinated revolution in Algeria to revolution in the mother country<sup>44</sup> and failed to take up a clear-cut position in favour of the liberation of the colonies.

The Executive Committee of the PCF made no real effort to bring its publications into line with the 8th condition. On the contrary, it failed to publicise precise directives emanating from the International Executive Committee on the colonial question.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Sidi-Bel-Abbès Scandal**

The French Communist Press did not publish the 'Appeal of the executive for the liberation of Algeria and Tunisia'<sup>46</sup> manifesto produced by the Executive Committee of the Third International on 20 May 1920. It became known mainly through the bourgeois press and brought about an open confrontation between the International and the French communists who most vociferously opposed the Leninist line on colonies, i.e. the North African Federations. These were almost solely composed of French settlers and were not representative of the colonised Arab-Berber populations. In their opinion the natives in North Africa were 'congenitally incapable of economic, social, intellectual and moral development'.<sup>47</sup> Consequently independence would engineer a historical regression in those territories which would return to feudalism and slavery. They argued that it was irresponsible to unleash such a calamity through agitating for the liberation of colonies and they underlined the necessity for France to stay in 'our colony'.<sup>48</sup> North African communists

clearly manifested their belief in the superiority of French civilisation and its progressive rule. They considered the independence of colonies neither as possible nor as desirable before the socialist revolution in France. They reacted very strongly to the International's Appeal known as the 'Moscow Appeal'. The Sidi-Bel-Abbès section of the PCF in Algeria in particular achieved notoriety by its letter addressed to the higher authorities of the PCF, in which it stated its total disagreement with the letter and the spirit of the 'Moscow Appeal'. The letter found its way to the Third International, which seized the opportunity to castigate what it considered to be erroneous tendencies in the French Party and in the International Communist Movement as a whole on the question of colonies.

At the Fourth Congress of the Third International Trotsky gave vent to his feelings in an impassioned speech, calling the Sidi-Bel-Abbès views a 'great scandal' and concluding that 'one could not tolerate in the party for two hours or two minutes comrades who have a slave-owner's mentality'.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the debate the 4th Congress of the International vigorously reasserted the Leninist line on the colonies both in the Resolution on the Eastern question and on the French question, passing a final judgement on the Sidi-Bel-Abbès communists and their likes. The International requested that the French Party 'condemn categorically the position of the communist section of Sidi-Bel-Abbès'.<sup>50</sup>

It also extended its criticisms to all well-paid European workers in the colonies imbued with capitalist and nationalist prejudices who shared such colonialist tendencies. Incriminating the French Party for its neglect of colonial matters, the resolution demanded a ruthless ideological struggle against the Sidi-Bel-Abbès line and the organisation of a campaign against colonial slavery, in France and in the colonies. The creation of a permanent colonial office adjunct to the Executive Committee of the Party was requested, encompassing representatives from communist native organisations.<sup>51</sup> The Fourth Congress of the International also instructed the PCF to 'defend without reservation their [the colonial populations] right to autonomy and independence'<sup>52</sup> and stressed support for the national demands of the colonised peoples. Sidi-Bel-Abbès had postulated that the main contradiction in Algeria was a class contradiction within the native population, so that the Arab-

Berber feudal lords and bourgeois were considered as the principal enemies. This attitude looks forward to some of the views expressed in Laurent Casanova's article published in 1939 which established a similar cleavage within the Arab-Berber population.<sup>53</sup> The Third International on the contrary followed the Leninist analysis which saw the contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed peoples as the main one in the colonies. The two approaches can be traced back to the resolutions put forward at the Tours Congress, by the Comité de Résistance Socialiste and by the Comité de la Troisième Internationale.

The PCF registered the criticisms of the International. A good number of communists in Algeria were expelled or resigned<sup>54</sup> but the Party showed no haste in its rectification campaign. The colonial Tribune in *l'Humanité* even disappeared causing discontent among the Colonial Commission. However, in Paris the PCF put forward an Algerian candidate, Hadj Ali Abdel Kader, for the electoral contest in a Paris constituency (May 1924).<sup>55</sup> Evidently conscious of its insufficiencies in colonial matters, the French party formulated a self-criticism on this question prior to the next International meeting. In July 1924, the Fifth Congress of the International, as one might have expected, renewed its criticisms of the PCF.<sup>56</sup>

Thereafter the PCF made an attempt to show more interest in the question of the colonies. The Comité d'Etudes Coloniales prepared a report outlining a programme of work on the colonial front, paying attention to theoretical considerations as well as to questions of propaganda and organisation: it planned to examine the role of the colonies in the capitalist system and the situation of colonised peoples, to work towards the recruitment into the Party of immigrant workers in the *métropole* and the recruitment of party members from the native populations in the colonies, to work towards the building of an anti-imperialist united front, and also to carry out anti-militarist work giving particular care to the formulation of immediate demands.<sup>57</sup>

## **The Rif War**

It did not take long before the Party was given the opportunity to put its anti-colonialist programme into practice. A crisis

broke out in 1924, which provided the Party with its baptism of fire: the Rif war. The Rif area of Morocco was under the control of Spain; the Emir Abd El Krim at the head of the Riffan fighters launched a successful insurrection in 1924, defeating the Spanish troops and proclaiming the independence of the Rif Republic. France, though not directly threatened, intervened against the Rif Republic for fear that the wind of rebellion might spread to its share of Morocco and destabilise its North African preserves, Algeria and Tunisia.

The Communist Party did not hesitate to extend its immediate support to the Rif. A message was sent to the Emir, signed by Doriot and Sémart, to pledge the solidarity of the French proletariat for the total liberation of Moroccan soil.

Communist deputies did not spare their efforts to condemn French colonialist aggression in the National Assembly. They denounced the role of the banks and the imperialist interests at stake whilst the working masses had to bear the burden of war expenses; they were the only ones to refuse a vote of confidence to the Painlevé Government (29 May 1925). They openly called on French soldiers to fraternise with the Riffans.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to propaganda work the PCF organised action against the war, prompting the creation of a joint Action Committee, which launched a campaign throughout France. Numerous demonstrations and meetings were held in the main big towns. Jacques Jurquet quotes forty simultaneous meetings.<sup>59</sup> The Party's own history manual mentions 15 000 Parisians attending a meeting in Luna Park on 17 May 1925.<sup>60</sup> A general strike was planned for 12 October which was followed by 900 000 workers.

Campaign work among civilians ran parallel to anti-militarist work in the army. According to Nicole Le Guennec anti-militarism and fraternisation occupied the forefront of the communist press.<sup>61</sup> The Communist Youth newspaper the *Avant Garde* published an 'Appeal to soldiers' as early as 1 October 1924, which was distributed clandestinely to the troops. Soldiers' demonstrations took place at the time of their departure, and some instances of fraternisation were recorded; protests among sailors delayed the departure of their ship.<sup>62</sup>

A comprehensive review of actions launched by the PCF would prove very tedious. The few details quoted above suffice to illustrate the Party's efforts against the Rif war. The key

axes of its line are best summarised in the Manifesto addressed by the PCF to workers and peasants in France and in the colonies on 13 May 1925. It demanded the recognition of the independent Rif Republic, the evacuation of French troops from Morocco and the fraternisation between French and Riffan soldiers.<sup>63</sup>

And yet the Party's action against the Rif war was not a complete success. The response to its slogans was limited; the balance sheet must include in the liabilities column the heavy repression that struck the Party and the lack of concrete results in the way of stopping the war. The PCF leadership declared that it had made 'ultra-left' tactical mistakes in its campaign against the Rif war.<sup>64</sup> However, it did not reach the conclusion that its line on colonialism and the Rif war had thereby been invalidated. According to both the PCF leadership and the International, the Party's action during the Rif war was to be considered as positive and even deserved congratulations.<sup>65</sup>

Reflecting upon that episode of PCF history, it is possible to view it as a watershed for subsequent reference. The PCF often prided itself in the years to come, quoting the Rif as proof of its resolute anti-colonialism. The *oppositionnels* during the Algerian war cited the PCF action against the Rif war to show up the Party's lack of actions against the Algerian war. In 1924, for the first time since its foundation, the PCF took up the third International position on colonialism; legalist and parliamentary aspirations were swept away by *députés* who did not hesitate, in the National Assembly itself, to call for fraternisation between French and Riffan soldiers. Admittedly the slogan of fraternisation was not absolutely new and the party had already striven to implement such recommendations during the French intervention in the Ruhr. Yet, when applied to an enemy engaged in a war against France, as was the case in the Rif, it sounded even more 'outrageous' to predominantly patriotic attitudes. The PCF had broken with a strong tradition of jacobinism and national solidarity.<sup>66</sup>

Independence for the Rif is of equal importance, as it is directly inspired by the principles on the right to self-determination (meaning independence). The PCF made a break with the SFIO and promoted the right of peoples to self-determination and to the independence of the colonies.<sup>67</sup> Independence

for the colonies was to remain a major demand for a few years to come.

After the 1926 Congress of the PCF it became customary for the Party to stress the need for a strong anti-colonialist struggle in the colonies and in the mother country. This was rendered more urgent as developing movements in Indo-China, Morocco and French Equatorial Africa (AEF) faced severe repression. On the whole, the Party's approach did not vary fundamentally, vouching support not only for proletarians in the colonies but also for the 'revolutionary national movements' fighting for their independence against imperialism.<sup>68</sup>

The tasks facing communists would include building an alliance with those movements in an attempt to draw them closer to an anti-imperialist united front. Though the anti-colonialist struggle did not occupy the forefront in the PCF's range of priorities, it was given a reasonable amount of attention. The International continued to keep it under review and encourage it, urging the Party to create local Sections of the International in the colonies, concentrating on the recruitment of native workers, i.e. independent communist parties affiliated to the Comintern. At home, the Party promoted the education of its own members of the working class, particularly immigrant workers, on the colonial question.

Independence for the colonies remained a stable constituent of the PCF's speech on the colonies.<sup>69</sup> Maurice Thorez reiterated this demand in the *Chambre des Députés* (4 March 1933); the early thirties witnessed an upsurge of insurrectionary movements in Indo-China followed by a terrible repression, and the PCF adopted the slogans 'Long live the independence of colonial peoples! Long live the independence of Indo-China!'<sup>70</sup> The strength of such statements leaves no doubt about the PCF's theoretical commitment against colonialism, but caution must be exercised to avoid oversimplification. In real terms, the Party's anti-colonialist work fluctuated in scope and in quality. The Party itself acknowledged this at its 1932 congress and adopted a resolution designed to promote better work on the colonial question.<sup>71</sup>

Recurrent observations and criticisms from the Comintern, accompanied by the PCF's regular self-criticisms, alternated with more intense 'colonial' work on the part of the Party. Despite the progress made in particular during the Rif war,

the PCF's 'bolshevisation' on the colonial question was still far from complete. It is possible to find an explanation for this in the Party's own words. It recognised that it had underestimated the 'anti-imperialist and anti-feudal insurrectional movement in the colonies and semi-colonies'<sup>72</sup> and neglected the ideological struggle against 'the chauvinistic, xenophobic and imperialist trends aroused by the bourgeoisie and social democracy.'<sup>73</sup> Those 'chauvinist' feelings were no doubt more resilient than the Party had expected. The 'imperialist' nature of France had a role to play in the generation of 'chauvinism' in France. The superprofits obtained from colonial exploitation could be used for the distribution of 'crumbs' (in Lenin's words)<sup>74</sup> to some sections of the French working class, thus blunting its anti-colonialist potential convictions.

### **The Popular Front**

Despite the attempts made since Tours to apply the line of the Third International, particularly during the Rif war, the PCF's 'bolshevisation' on the colonial question was still difficult. In the mid-thirties, the urgent threat of fascism mobilised the majority of the Party's resources, pushing the colonial task into the background. It seems that during a transition period from February 1934 to the first three months of 1935 the PCF tried to combine anti-fascism and anti-imperialism, more specifically in the Algerian context.<sup>75</sup> But the latter of the two was soon relinquished as fascism became the central preoccupation for the communist parties: it was described as such by Dimitrov in his report to the 7th Congress of the International in 1935.

With the development of the very deep economic crisis, with the general crisis of capitalism becoming sharply accentuated and the mass of working people becoming revolutionised, fascism had embarked upon a wide offensive. The ruling bourgeoisie more and more seeks salvation in fascism, with the object of taking exceptional predatory measures against the working people, preparing for an imperialist war of plunder.<sup>76</sup>

Dimitrov also held up the PCF as an example for its successes in the building of a United Front against fascism. The Popular Front came to power in April-June 1936 in France,

with the support of the PCF (but not its participation). From then on the Party's line on the colonies was tailored not to upset the balance of the Popular Front government. The PCF contented itself with the reforms promised by the Front to the colonies (general democratic measures, the opening up of gaols). These reforms often remained a dead letter as a reluctant colonial administration hampered their implementation. For instance, the Blum-Violette proposal, despite its moderation, infuriated the Algerian settlers, who made sure that it was not even discussed in the National Assembly (thanks to their powerful lobby).

Two remarks must be made on the Party's support for Popular Front reforms in the colonies: the PCF did not object to French control over the colonies and its prime concern was not the improvement of the colonised peoples' situation. It pressed for reforms in the colonies, mainly for fear that the colonised peoples might otherwise detach themselves from France, falling prey to fascist propaganda.<sup>77</sup>

The Party's position is open to interpretation. It can be seen as a return to a pre-Tours (or rather pre-Rif war) line. Some historians hold it as an approval of the assimilationist policy.<sup>78</sup> George Cogniot understands those reforms as a transitional stage, but also a qualitative change, 'a democracy which, although not socialist as yet, would not be bourgeois any more'.<sup>79</sup>

In more simple terms, it is evident that the PCF had subordinated the colonial question to the decisive issue of the day: the struggle against fascism. The future development of events appears to have confirmed the validity of the Party's anxiety concerning fascism. The PCF consequently stopped agitating for the independence of the colonies and their separation from France at that particular point in time to counter the risk that French colonies might become a 'reserve' of fascism. The PCF, whilst maintaining the principle of support to the right of self-determination for the colonies, ceased to demand their independence. Maurice Thorez in his closing speech to the 1937 Party congress on the contrary advocated closer links between France and its colonies: 'We must secure a free, trustful and fraternal union of colonial peoples and democratic France against fascism which instigates rebellions and civil war in the colonies.'<sup>80</sup>

This epoch therefore marks a new turning point in the PCF's



policy on the colonies: the concept of a union between colonised peoples and democratic France replaced the almost unconditional demand for the rupture of relationships between France and its colonies, i.e. independence. It had come to stay. The Party's analysis was not new; it resembled Serrati's thesis that liberation movements in the colonies would necessarily be absorbed by another imperialist country.<sup>81</sup> It looked forward to the Party's policy on colonies for most of the next two decades. After the war (1945) the Party would feel that independence for French colonies would be tantamount to abandoning them to US imperialism.

### **The Union Française (French Union)**

During the Second World War, no qualitative change is to be noticed in the PCF's policy towards the colonies. The emphasis on unity between France and its colonies was confirmed all the more after the USSR had been attacked by Nazi Germany in 1941. The perspective of victory for democratic France, the coming to life of a 'New France' that would be a friend to colonised peoples and establish a fruitful alliance with them, made part of a foreseeable future. The concept of a 'Free Union' between colonised peoples and France began to take shape in the realm of probabilities and would be realised after 1945, in the opinion of the PCF.

The conclusion of the Second World War not only demonstrated the victory of 'democracy' over fascism. It had a profound impact on the colonial world. France, though victorious, emerged from the war much weakened: she had shown herself to be divided, conquered and occupied. As a corollary the colonised peoples had become aware of their own strength as Free France solicited their help in the war effort. In return they expected a number of concessions; the Brazzaville Conference<sup>82</sup> had augured limited improvements: pent up hopes fostered latent rebellion.

For the drafting of a new constitution, the Empire was on the agenda. The popular forces in France brought an absolute 'left' majority (Socialists and Communists) to the Constituent Assembly; the PCF having gained prestige and votes from its active participation in the Resistance played an important role in the making of the new Constitution.

The PCF furthered the line it had established at its 1945 congress: free association between the colonised and the French peoples. The French Union was incorporated in the Constitution which also brought about changes in the colonial regime, such as the abolition of the *code de l'indigénat*, and of forced labour, the elimination of a dual electoral college (except for Algeria), and the introduction of a labour code. The Party voted in favour of the Constitution and the French Union.

Let us note that the PCF advocated once more the maintenance of links between France and its colonies, specifically discouraging them from demanding independence at that point in time, given the conjuncture: 'France's departure from Vietnam would not serve the cause of liberty.'<sup>83</sup>

### **The War in Indo-China**

Upon the defeat of the Japanese, the Vietnamese national insurrection led to the proclamation of the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September 1945. An agreement with the French government recognised the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) as 'a free State with a government, a parliament, its own army and its own finances, forming part of the Indo-Chinese Union and the French Union'.<sup>84</sup>

France was less magnanimous in its handling of the Indo-Chinese situation than the declaration couched in its Constitution suggested and launched a war of colonial reconquest. The PCF adopted a dual approach to the question: it disapproved of the war (communist deputies abstained in a vote on military credits on 20 March 1947) but it did not advocate separation between Indo-China and France. On the one hand it argued that France ought to have respected its own Constitution, which was violated by the aggression on Indo-China; the PCF here posed as the best champion of the Constitution. On the other hand, the Party encouraged Indo-China to remain a part of the French Union.<sup>85</sup> The PCF's strategy was guided by its analysis of US 'hegemonist designs' threatening France's independence, and Vietnam's equally. The Party envisaged an alliance between France and Vietnam on the basis of this common interest, entrusting the French government with the capacity and desire to further this alliance. This

understanding might explain the relative moderation of the protest organised by the Party against the war. It endeavoured to manifest its opposition without breaking governmental solidarity – whilst communist deputies abstained on 20 March, ministers voted with the government. The Party's analysis of the role of France in a bipolarised world played a part in its policy; this will be examined in the following chapter.

Subsequently the PCF's action against the war in Indo-China widened and hardened. A number of factors contributed to this progress. The Party eventually realised that there was no comeback after its eviction from the government on 5 May 1947. An anti-communist wave was sweeping over European governments; Italian and Belgian communist parties were also expelled within a few months of each other.<sup>86</sup> If the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall plan had not sufficiently clarified the situation, the first meeting of the Cominform (September 1947) and the Jdanov report<sup>87</sup> lay down clearly the interpretation of the world situation to be adopted by Communist Parties.

The world had been divided into two camps; the cold war set in. Jdanov outlined the task of European communist parties: to counter the US offensive to gain control of Western Europe, to expose the Socialist Parties for their collaboration with the US, to preserve world peace and avert a possible US aggression against the USSR. The PCF and its Italian counterpart were severely criticised by the meeting for their 'parliamentarism' and their readiness to compromise with Socialists in order to remain a government party.<sup>88</sup> The PCF had to promise to make amends and to mobilise the French people against American imperialism.<sup>89</sup>

In Indo-China the emphasis had shifted from a war of colonial reconquest to a crusade against communism, as the USA had become heavily committed to military expenses in Vietnam. The Korean war (1950) strengthened this interpretation. The Party then considered that the Indo-Chinese liberation movement was waging a struggle against the USA in alliance with France, which they backed politically and financially. France itself was becoming more and more indebted to the USA. In the light of these new data and analysis, the PCF could argue that the Indo-Chinese liberation struggle, the cause of French national independence and the preservation of world

peace, harmoniously converged. Opposition to American imperialism became the PCF's main axis. Consequently, it devoted more resources to the support of the movement in Indo-China and intensified its campaign against the war: dockers in Marseille and Algeria followed by others refused to load military equipment bound for Indo-China; railway workers followed suit; in the Renault factory, workers downed tools; a number of demonstrations took place against the departure of soldiers (Avignon, Mont Valérien).<sup>90</sup>

The most significant theme of this action was that of peace rather than independence for Vietnam; in accordance with the general Peace Movement, all forces being mustered were to protect the USSR against a US assault. The slogan of peace in this context corresponded to a world-wide cry among communist parties under the leadership of the Soviet Union. It had inspired the creation of the Peace Movement in 1949 and constituted a pre-emptive move against a possible US aggression against the USSR.

Its decision to join the Third International compelled the PCF to accept and undertake a process of 'bolshevisation'. The colonial question thus was made to assume particular significance as it was stipulated in the 8th condition – even more so for a party active in an imperialist country such as France which controlled a vast colonial empire.

The PCF was slow to acknowledge the importance of its 'colonial work'. The agenda of its first two congresses does not mention it. The 3rd Congress in Lyon (1924) includes part of a section entitled 'the colonial question', among the questions of sport, children and others. The 4th (Clichy, 1925) and 5th (Lille, 1926) Congresses include a report from the Colonial Commission. In the meantime the Party had developed an intense activity against the Rif war, turning it into a priority area of party work. At the Party's 6th Congress (1929) a section of the PCF's theses dealt with the 'general tasks of the PCF in the revolutionary movement of colonial peoples and national minorities'. The thesis no. 33 specifically concerned itself with the Party's tasks in the French colonies. In 1932 (7th Congress) a fresh resolution was deemed necessary on the Party's 'colonial work' which in fact constituted a self-criticism on account of the Party's insufficient activities in the colonies and on the

colonial question. Throughout this period, the PCF did not in fact sustain a continuous interest in the colonial question. On the contrary, the PCF kept attracting the criticisms of the Third International for its lack of activities in the colonial field. These were generally followed by self-criticisms on the part of the PCF, which found it difficult not to slip back on its 'good' resolutions. The Rif war constituted a noticeable extraordinary effort from the PCF. However, the Party seems to show a genuine, if not always successful, attempt to expose French imperialism/colonialism. In October 1934 150 000 leaflets entitled *The Greater France (La plus grande France)* were distributed. In January 1935, the PCF published 5,000 pamphlets about Tunisia: *What Is Happening in Tunisia?*, and another 5000 on Algeria, *The Bloody Provocation of Constantine*. Independence for the colonies was generally the main slogan put forward by the Party up until 1936.

After 1936 the PCF concentrated all its efforts to combat fascism, and favoured a 'union' between French colonies and 'democratic France'. The World War and the Nazi occupation of France kept the PCF occupied for a few more years. The urgency of the issues at stake and the strategy of the International Communist Movement did not allow the PCF to devote much attention to the colonies.

When the war was over the PCF did not resume its pre-1936 position and refrained from demanding the independence of colonies. Only the Indo-China war combining with the cold war slowly aroused in the PCF a virulence and activity which reached its peak at the end of the forties and the early fifties. As this struggle fitted within the PCF's general campaign for peace – against a potential aggression on the USSR by the US, against US hegemony and a possible world war – peace in Vietnam was the main slogan upheld by the Party, though it also came to demand independence for Vietnam.

Apart from this episode the PCF's anti-colonialist activities and convictions continued to assume a secondary place, although they were never abandoned totally. They had shifted from a clear-cut demand of 'independence' to a less intransigent position, couched in various slogans: 'Free and fraternal union', 'French Union', insisting on the need for equality in the partnership between France and its colonial territories rather than their political separation.

### 3 The PCF, the International Situation and the Algerian War

The very nature of the PCF combining an internationalist and a national vocation makes it necessary to take into account the world situation as well as developments in France itself for a better understanding of its line on colonialism in general and Algeria in particular. The Party generally elaborated its policies in view of a global analysis of the international situation, assessing the balance of forces in the world in favour of or against the cause of socialism. Such analysis was not formulated by the PCF in isolation but together with the International Communist Movement of which it formed a part. In the first place, the PCF's perceived 'duty' of advancing the cause of socialism world-wide, from about 1925 onwards, translated itself into the defence of the USSR, 'the motherland of socialism', against all possible threats. Its internationalist duty also imposed on the Party responsibilities towards the working class in other capitalist countries and the national liberation movements in colonial countries. At the same time, at a national level, the Party had to pay special attention to the particular situation in France, the complexities of French political life, the state of the economy, the needs of the working masses, etc. All of these factors intertwined in varying fashions with differing degrees of importance to determine the PCF's policy, which could be altered in its hierarchy of priorities according to the development of events.

1954

For the entire duration of the cold war, the Party line could be pictured in relatively simple terms. The main element taken into account by the PCF was the division of the world into two camps and the resulting anti-communist wave.

The USSR and Eastern European countries were seen to be

under threat from the USA. The latter was considered the spearhead of imperialism endeavouring to extend its supremacy all over the world, imposing its diktat among weaker imperialist countries like France, coveting their colonies. Internally, the PCF on the eve of the Algerian war continued to interpret the situation as a reflection of the polarisation of the world into two camps. This thesis had first been expounded at the first Cominform meeting in 1947.

For the Party, the main front all round was therefore a ruthless opposition to the US in all fields of policy on the premise that any move undermining its power was worth supporting. Consequently the main task outlined by the PCF's 13th Congress in 1954, which in effect had been a constant since 1946, was the campaign for a French policy independent of US influence against 'the disastrous policy of submission to American imperialists'.<sup>1</sup> This meant opposition to the pro-US stance of the French government. In this task the Party organised the Peace Movement in France with the aim of warding off the possibility of an aggression against the USSR. The same reasons explain its demand for a withdrawal from the Atlantic Pact and its opposition to the rearmament of West Germany and to the European Defence Community, which were deemed to be the instruments of US expansionist policy.

Hoisting the banner of national independence the Party endeavoured to rally 'the union of national and democratic forces'<sup>2</sup> against the encroachments of the US in France. The Party concentrated all its efforts on this front. The question of colonies in general and Algeria in particular were also envisaged in this context. Practically every item of policy was related to the US 'threat' to French national independence. It advocated the safeguarding of French industry 'sacrificed to US competition' and jeopardised by numerous American investments. It blamed the difficulties of the French economy and its impact on the working people on a supposed crisis in the US economy. It linked the struggle for democratic rights to the campaign against US influence, denouncing 'MacCarthyism' in culture, in the press and in research. These main points were synthesised by the 1954 Congress.<sup>3</sup> The PCF itself had fallen prey to the wave of anti-communism prevalent during the cold war. Whilst it strove to come out of its isolation through a strategy of unity with all patriots for a policy of national inde-

pendence, the PCF kept denouncing the Socialist Party for its policy of 'alienation of our national independence',<sup>4</sup> as had been the custom ever since the 1947 Cominform meeting where the PCF had been criticised for its compromising attitude towards the Socialist Party.

How does the question of Algeria relate to the other aspects of the PCF's approach? Although it may not appear self-evident, for the Party there was no contradiction between the analyses outlined above and its line on Algeria. According to the PCF's official explanations, the latter seemed to follow directly from the former for the simple reason that national liberation movements were seen by the PCF through the prism of an underlying anti-US approach. The Party opposed the installation of US military bases in Morocco and American investments in the Maghreb. Whilst defending the right of peoples to self-determination, it warned French colonies against the danger of falling under the US yoke, after obtaining their independence from France. The alternative proposed by the PCF was that of a 'French Union', wherein Algeria could establish a new relationship with France, 'devoid of colonial ties'. This is one reason why the PCF preferred to demand 'liberty' for Algeria rather than independence when the insurrection broke out, and favoured the retention of links between Algeria and France, 'on the basis of equality'. The French Union failed to fulfil the Party's hopes for a harmonious relationship between France and its colonies. It was dropped from the PCF's programme at its 14th Congress in 1956.

The approach described above discloses a strong coherence running through all PCF policies. For the PCF the interests of France coincided with the interests of the colonial people since the independence of both sides was endangered by the USA, plus the fact that it saw France as being basically the mother of democracy. They were also in harmony with the necessary defence of the USSR against its main enemy, the USA. All the threads of the Party's analysis lead from and to the basic assumption that the contradictions in the world could be reduced in a relatively simple fashion to the main one in the PCF's outlook: imperialism versus socialism, i.e. the USA against the USSR.



1956

The 13th Congress of the Party in June 1954 still gave precedence to matters of foreign policy. A shift of emphasis may be observed thereafter for a number of reasons.

A new interpretation of the world situation was presented by the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party (CPSU) in 1956, which failed to win the unanimous support of the International Communist Movement and eventually developed into a major split. The PCF could not but be shaken by those events and although it was later to align itself with the Soviet position, it went through a period of adaptation, readjusting old reflexes and habits to the new outlook. At a time when the autonomy and initiative of individual parties was stressed more (with the dissolution of the Kominform)<sup>5</sup> the specific characters of the French situation and the French Party assumed more importance. This was brought out even more by the great difficulties faced by France and the PCF during the Algerian war.

Developments following Stalin's death (in 1953) punctuated the end of one era and the slow emergence of a new one: the cold war was to be replaced by the epoch of '*détente*' (ratified in 1956 at the CPSU 20th Congress). The 20th Congress of the CPSU was momentous in its consequences for the International Communist Movement. Recording that 'the forces of socialism' had increased, it introduced as a new concept the possibility of averting a world war. The 20th Congress posited peaceful competition as a concomitant of peaceful coexistence between countries of a different regime: 'international *détente*' was the order of the day, and must be transformed into a 'lasting peace'. The diversity of the paths leading to socialism was noted, emphasising the concrete possibility of a 'peaceful road to socialism'.

Other aspects of the 20th Congress would undoubtedly affect the PCF, such as the 'Krushchev Report' on Stalin (which the PCF ignored), but it seems appropriate to comment on the two considerations mentioned above as they were the main ones taken up by the PCF itself in its 14th Congress.

'*Détente*' opened a wider scope of action for the French Party which was not obliged any more to subordinate other issues to the US threat; according to the new line, the threat of a foreign aggression against the USSR was not as acute as pre-

viously. The internal situation no longer had to play second fiddle to international questions.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed the 'cold war' atmosphere in France itself had begun to thaw; the Socialist Party had been thrown into opposition in 1955, and the PCF toned down its revolutionary invective against the socialist leaders. A potential alliance between the PCF and the Socialist Party began to develop. After a measure of trade-union unity had been achieved during 1955, the PCF campaigned for a victory of the left in the 1956 elections.

Moreover, the notion of a 'peaceful road to socialism' advanced by the PCSU 20th Congress came to confirm both the possibility and the necessity of forging an alliance between 'the forces of the left' in order to ensure 'a solid majority in Parliament and to transform the latter from an instrument of the bourgeois system into a vehicle of the genuine will of the people supported by the revolutionary movement of the masses'.<sup>7</sup>

The optimism raised among French communists by the election of the Socialist Party to power was strengthened by the visit of socialist leaders to the Soviet Union, auguring what the PCF believed to be a policy of friendship. The French situation appeared to be in harmony with the international scene as it had been portrayed by the CPSU 20th Congress.

The main discordant note for the PCF was the war developing on Algerian soil which could hardly be interpreted as a favourable factor for *détente* in France and in the world. However, that need be no major problem since the question of Algeria was not a priority area for the Party and remained subordinated to the more urgent task of building the United Front. According to some interpretations the Algerian question even provided grounds for unity of action with the Socialist Party prior to the 1956 election,<sup>8</sup> as they voted together against the government on that issue.

'Negotiation and peace' in Algeria was one of the themes of the 1956 election. It would be preposterous to assume that the PCF would not otherwise have paid any attention to the Algerian problem but it could be construed that the PCF relied on the election of a left Parliament to bring a solution to the Algerian crisis. Electoral victory failed to achieve this result. However, the Algerian problem still did not come to the forefront of the PCF's policy. It had previously receded in front

of foreign policy matters (1954 Congress); by 1956 it gave way to domestic questions as the Party envisaged the possibility of establishing a new Popular Front. The development of events left no doubt about the prominence attached to the United Front by the PCF over other aspects of its policy such as the Algerian question. The determining incidence of the United Front with the Socialist Party on the PCF's line *vis-à-vis* Algeria may best be seen by taking note of its vote on the Special Powers, which showed its allegiance to unity with the Socialists. Whether the PCF by then genuinely believed that Guy Mollet required the Special Powers in order to impose peace in Algeria, the main motivation behind the PCF's vote in favour of the Special Powers stands out unequivocally. As M. Thorez put it, in *l'Humanité* (27 March 1956), the Party did not want to sacrifice the whole for the part.

The explanation for this vote clearly indicated that the United Front took precedence over the Algerian problem which was relegated to a secondary position. This vote definitely did not lead to appeasement in Algeria. Much to the contrary, the Special Powers signified an escalation of the war in Algeria resulting in the involvement of French conscripts in addition to the professional army; by September 1956, 600 000 troops were stationed in Algeria. All hope of a ceasefire had been pushed further away. Among the conscripts, discontent took the shape of demonstrations in barracks, stations and docks. A number of individuals refused to leave for Algeria. The Party, whilst offering moderate support to the demonstrators, refrained from openly encouraging those soldiers who disobeyed the departure order. In its 14th Congress (1956) the Party endorsed the decision it had taken to support the Special Powers and abstained from promoting the slogan of independence for Algeria.

This was in glaring contradiction with the demands of the Algerian National Liberation Movement which had been waging an armed struggle for Algerian independence since 1954. During those two years, it had become more difficult to believe that the armed struggle was the work of a handful of terrorists since it was increasingly embraced by a majority of the population. The FLN which had taken the initiative for the insurrection had rallied Ferhat Abbas and Tewfik El Madani, bringing to the Front the support of the UDMA and the

*oulema*. This meant that all the important national parties and organisations in Algeria then became united with the FLN (apart from Messali Hadj's MNA\* which was to become more and more unrepresentative). One could not claim any more that the FLN was not representative of the National Liberation Movement and the Algerian people. Yet the PCF avoided mentioning the FLN in official declarations, keeping to general formulas such as 'those against whom we are fighting'.<sup>9</sup>

The year 1956 failed to fulfil the hopes for 'peace and social progress' it had aroused among communists. The Suez Crisis merely added sourness to disillusionment. The Party criticised the Socialist Government for its intervention in Egypt but was itself subject to attacks because of the Hungarian events.

The Algerian struggle continued to escalate; on 22 October the French army intercepted a Moroccan plane and arrested the FLN leaders of the External Delegation who were flying from Morocco to Tunisia (Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamed Khider, Ait Ahmed, Boudiaf, and Mostafa Lacheraf, a historian). This action was ratified by the government and dispelled any possibility of negotiation. Combined with the bitter failure of the Suez adventure, such an act of piracy discredited the Socialist government in the eyes of the world and the French people. Generally the situation in France was deteriorating and the Algerian war played an important part in the erosion of democratic liberties at the same time as it weighed heavily on the French economy. The conscripts movement had slowed down to a standstill after 1956 but was replaced by a growing malaise in France as the realities of the war became known: the rule of the army in Algeria and its atrocities – internment camps, torture en masse, etc. (By December there were 900 000 French soldiers in Algeria.) A number of organisations and committees sprung up in response to these atrocities, with little official support from the PCF though a number of communist individuals joined them. At the beginning of 1957, for the first time, the term independence was pronounced by M. Thorez in relation to Algeria, whilst the Party declared Algeria to be a 'formed' nation; until then it had been described as a 'nation in formation'.

The Party's attention having been focused on protests against the appointment of General Speidel (an ex-Nazi) as Commander of NATO's European Forces, it took until 17

October 1957 for the PCF to organise a day of action for peace in Algeria.

In its 'Appeal to the French people'<sup>10</sup> the Party then did not stress the independence of Algeria but rather the new links that should be established between the two countries. The day of action itself was not called in the name of independence but in the name of peace in Algeria. Such emphasis on the part of the PCF was soon to attract severe criticism from circles more committed to the Algerian struggle inside and outside the Party.

1958

All the efforts exerted by the Party towards the consolidation of the United Front bore little fruit. The Fourth Republic was nearing its end. During the tormented events leading to De Gaulle's accession to power, the PCF remained on a cautious defensive. Right-wing extremists were stirring up an ominous atmosphere; the uncertainty of the future may have conjured up for the Party the threat of being made illegal. When Pflimlin asked for the Special Powers to handle the situation, the PCF, posing as the champion of the Constitution, voted in his favour since it considered the Republic to be in danger and wished to emerge as the best defender of republicanism. The circumstances surrounding De Gaulle's 'election' gave rise to serious concern on the part of the PCF. De Gaulle was 'invited' to step in as a result of a right-wing coup staged by the settlers in Algiers with the connivance of the army. This new Constitution, put to a referendum, rallied 79.25 per cent of the votes against 20.75 per cent, inflicting a severe defeat on the PCF. This confirmed the Party's awe of a Gaullist government.

On De Gaulle and his Fifth Republic was focused all the attention of the Party as he polarised in its eyes all the most reactionary aspects of French policy. On matters of foreign policy De Gaulle was indicated as a clear proponent of 'Americanism', mortgaging French national independence to the USA and sabotaging *détente* in the world. On the economic front, De Gaulle, being considered as the arm of the capitalist monopolies, could only increase the exploitation of the working masses, inflicting a brake on social progress.

With De Gaulle's coming to power new reasons had cropped up which allowed (or forced) the PCF to continue to give prime attention to the domestic situation at the expense of the Algerian question. For the PCF, De Gaulle's foreign policy as well as his economic policy were the logical consequence of his whole approach to democracy. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic concentrated immense powers in the hands of the President. This is why the main thrust of the PCF's programme concentrated on the 'restoration and renovation of democracy' in France, putting forward changes in the Constitution, the electoral system, the legal apparatus, the army (for the abolition of the professional army), the police force, the control of the media. The 15th Congress of the Party (June 1959) introduced the restoration and renovation of democracy as a platform providing the basis for 'the unity of all democratic and national forces', 'inseparable from the establishment of socialism in France'.

The aim was to transform the National Assembly into 'a real tool for the building of socialism in France'.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that the 'peaceful road to socialism' was still being pursued. Unity with 'democratic and national forces' was substituted for the United Front with the Socialist Party, the leaders of which had been castigated for advocating a yes vote on De Gaulle's Constitution.

The Algerian war itself was interpreted by the PCF through the prism of De Gaulle's coming to power: De Gaulle's regime was the child of the Algerian war, brought to rule over France by an extreme right-wing putsch in Algeria. According to the Party's analysis in its 15th Congress, De Gaulle was bent on accomplishing the task for which the *ultras*\* relied on him in the first place. The PCF envisaged a solution to the war as a result of the overthrow of De Gaulle. Once again the question of the Algerian war came second, this time to the central task of ousting De Gaulle's regime, whereas in 1956 it gave way to the unity between Socialists and communists, for a solution to the war through the Socialist Party in power. Though the PCF's 15th Congress spoke of the Algerian war as 'a canker in the side of the country',<sup>12</sup> destroying the material and human resources of France, breeding racism and chauvinism among French people, hampering the normalisation of relations between France and the newly independent states of Tunisia

and Morocco, yet it was not treated as a separate issue; it is dealt with in a subsection of the foreign policy theses. The key question remained 'the elimination of the regime of personal power imposed by the monopolies'.<sup>13</sup>

For the sake of accuracy, one must add that the Party's analysis of De Gaulle and his regime was not confirmed by later events. De Gaulle's 'national policy' led him to conduct an anti-US policy, for instance withdrawing France from NATO.

In 1960, the divergence between the 'national' character of De Gaulle's policy and 'cosmopolitan' capital (i.e. collusion with the USA) was pointed out by Servin, Casanova and a few other intellectuals. Their approach was vigorously denied by the Party's leading circles and they were demoted from their posts (expelled from the Polit Bureau during the 23–24th February 1961 Central Committee meeting) after being accused of opportunism. They had also adopted a more liberal attitude towards the non-communist left, favouring the Party's involvement in unitary actions and organisations against the Algerian war. Laurent Casanova is said to have followed the 'Italian line', towards a wider and deeper 'destalinisation' process.<sup>14</sup>

## AFTER 1959

On the question of Algeria, the PCF adopted a very clear cut position at its 16th Congress in 1961: 'Since the first days of the Algerian war communists fight for the recognition of the right to independence.'<sup>15</sup>

The Party was thus attempting to claim that it had campaigned for Algerian independence 'since the first days of the war'. The accuracy of such a statement could be disputed but it undoubtedly betrayed the Party's desire to state its position more categorically in favour of independence, perhaps to refute accusations that it had not done so earlier on. Moreover it called for immediate negotiations with the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic,<sup>16</sup> on which it bestowed the title of the only qualified representative of the Algerian people.<sup>17</sup>

How had this clear-cut standpoint come about since 1958? A number of factors had led the Party to drop its excessive prudence over the Algerian war. In France the situation accelerated furthermore after 1959 (15th Congress). Even though

the PCF continued to assert that De Gaulle and his 'personal power' were the real enemy, it could not ignore the fascist threat clearly emanating from Algiers and the war.

In January 1960, barricades went up in Algiers, erected by settlers who enjoyed the tacit support of the army. In April 1961, an army putsch captured power in Algiers and made for a landing in Paris. Meanwhile the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS, composed of extreme ring-wing settlers or *ultras*) intensified its campaign of terrorist activities in France and in Algeria.

These events brought home to the French people the pressing need for terminating the war, 'a gangrene'<sup>18</sup> as P. Vidal-Naquet called it. French public opinion became increasingly mobilised against the Algerian war, amongst the youth in particular: on 27 October 1960 a meeting at the Mutualité hall called on the initiative of the Union Nationale des Étudiants Français (UNEF) assembled 20 000 people who spilled into the adjacent square attracting a good number of young communists from the Union des Etudiants Communistes (UEC) though the Party officially dissociated itself from it.

Wider sections of the French population joined the protest against the war: on 9 January 1961 a Joint Manifesto was signed by 11 parties and trade unions for a negotiated peace in Algeria.<sup>19</sup> Numerous committees for peace in Algeria and against fascism were rallying a growing support.

Even international opinion pronounced itself against the Algerian war: in January 1961 the UN adopted the Afro-Asian motion on Algerian independence.<sup>20</sup> If the PCF had any misgivings left about the representativeness of the GPRA, those had been dispelled by the USSR's official recognition of the GPRA in October 1960.

The PCF had been very careful in its dealings with the Algerian war. Did it depart from its self-professed anti-colonialism, to what extent and for what reasons? These questions cannot be answered in a simple manner. It is worth remembering that the PCF's line on colonialism had to be 'corrected' more than once in the past on the basis of criticisms from the International. A number of criticisms of the Party's lack of support for the Algerian struggle were voiced from within the Party and the International Communist Movement. But the ICM itself was divided on the issue of anti-colonialist struggles.



The Chinese Communist Party (CPC) laid stress on the utmost importance of national liberation struggles, on the outcome of which 'in a sense . . . the whole cause of the international proletarian revolution hinges'<sup>21</sup> because they are at the 'centre of world contradictions'. Their blows to imperialism could undermine its whole basis.

In the eyes of the CPC, the campaign for peace and disarmament launched from the USSR led to the sacrifice of national liberation struggles on the altar of peaceful co-existence. In 'Apologists of neo-colonialism' the CPC censured both the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the PCF for their 'opposition to wars of national liberation' and called the PCF leaders 'chauvinists'.<sup>22</sup> A lengthy exposé of the Chinese theses is not justified at this point. Yet it is necessary to mention them as their earlier writings stimulated some of the opposition within the PCF. The PCF's leading circles paid little heed to China's criticism and preferred to ride with the CPSU.

This chapter has briefly outlined a number of factors which influenced the PCF's policies on Algeria; it has also provided a few guidelines for the evolution of its line on Algeria for the duration of the war. World events played a part in determining the Party's position, but more than events themselves their interpretation by the world communist movement was of paramount importance. The guidelines to this interpretation were provided by the Soviet Union, undisputed until divergences occurred in the world communist movement; from an internal dispute and correspondence between the Soviet Party and its supporters on one side, the Albanian and Chinese parties on the other side, it brought into the open what came to be known as the Sino-Soviet split in the early mid-sixties. The PCF remained unswayed by the CPC and continued to draw its inspiration from the CPSU. However, the analysis of the French scene – the promises of the United Front in 1956, De Gaulle's advent to power in 1958 and its sequels, punctuated by the dramatic coup attempts staged from Algiers against French Parliamentary democracy – came to play an increasingly prominent role, swaying the PCF's attitude towards the Algerian war. Furthermore, the Party's desire not to 'cut itself off from the French masses' equally lent its weight to its policy-

making. However, its communist principles of internationalist support for the Algerian war of liberation could not be totally forgotten. Moreover from within the ranks of the PCF a fair number of opposing views were voiced prompting the publication of a few dissidents' reviews.

## 4 The French Nation

This chapter on the French nation arose from objections which *oppositionnels* formulated against the PCF position. Raising a fundamental question about the class character of France, they levelled accusations of chauvinism against the Party and challenged it theoretically. This debate necessitated further research into the Party's conception of the alignment of classes and their relationship with the French nation. It bears strong relevance to the Party's conception of the Algerian nation and its attitude towards the army.

In their polemics on the French nation both the Party and the *oppositionnels* quoted Marxist classics. However, it is not the study of Marxist thought on the nation that can help us elucidate the PCF's outlook. Marx himself did not produce an exhaustive exposé on the national question; none of his major works was devoted to it. Altogether the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin do not provide any comprehensive blueprint. Their approach to the nation and their application of Marxism to the national question varied in accordance with the concrete historical circumstances under examination. This facilitated the possibility of giving different interpretations to a text thereafter. Rather than the quotations themselves their interpretation by the Party or the *oppositionnels* reveals the real nature of the debate.

Consequently, the significance of a quotation did not lie solely or mainly in the text of the quote as such; its real meaning was implied rather than spelt out by the choice of a specific quote in a particular context. The PCF and the *oppositionnels* thus used quotations and sometimes manipulated them for the purpose of justifying their point of view and actions. A careful study of the whole text, including quotations, can enable us to understand and analyse the Party's approach to the French nation and the views of the *oppositionnels*.

## THE PCF AND THE 'GRANDEUR' OF THE FRENCH NATION

French national independence and grandeur emerged as regular themes in PCF post-war propaganda. The numerous occasions on which the Party posed as the champion of national independence and French grandeur helped to turn these slogans into political leitmotifs. This position assumed particular importance during the Algerian war for two main reasons:

1. The Party's approach to the French nation was an essential factor determining the Party's line on Algeria.
2. It came under criticism from within, and remained an object of debate throughout the Algerian war for the *oppositionnels*, who wished to devote more efforts and resources to combating colonialist and chauvinist ideology.

An original aspect of the Party's view of French national independence and grandeur was that it extended beyond the borders of the *hexagone* (mainland France).

The Party's positions on the overseas territories and Algeria remained in careful harmony with the general defence of French national independence. In 1947, the Party was in favour of the continuation of a 'French presence' in the Far East and regretted the 'loss' of Lebanon and Syria.<sup>1</sup>

Jacques Duclos in 1947 asserted again that it was in 'France's interest' to maintain a French influence in the Far East,<sup>2</sup> and Pierre Cot in 1955 confirmed the French people's desire to see the continuation of a French 'presence' in North Africa.<sup>3</sup>

In 1958 Saharan oil was considered by the Party as a potential instrument of French energy independence.<sup>4</sup>

Partial explanations related to strategic or tactical considerations do not account for the consistent emphasis laid by the PCF on French national independence. Jean Martelli finds that the notion of national independence has been a permanent feature of Party policy since 1934.<sup>5</sup> The stability and persistence of the slogan is overwhelming; it could be construed as an indication that the PCF posited national independence as a principle guiding its policy, rather than a slogan depending on strategic and tactical objectives. My study of the Party's texts on nation, bourgeoisie and proletariat reveals an underlying

assumption: the permanence of the French nation and its valuable contribution, past, present and future, to the progress of mankind. The PCF theoretical approach about the French nation tended to demonstrate that it was worthy of support and deserved to live on.

## **Historic Law and the Nation**

In the first place, the Party claimed that it had 'discovered' a new historical 'law' governing the evolution of nations:

The scientific study of the evolution of human societies has made it possible to elicit the following law: once a class has fulfilled its historic role and thus hinders the development of society, it separates itself from the nation while the interests of the rising class coincide with the national interest.<sup>6</sup>

According to this new law, a class, which has completed its historical role and which is not progressive any more, detaches itself from the nation. The formulation of the text leads one to believe that this is true for all societies. Nowhere does the text specify that it refers to the birth and life of capitalist societies or any other. This general declaration implies the permanence of the nation as though it had existed throughout a number of historical epochs and modes of production. The Party document quoted the examples of the feudal *Émigrés* in Koblenz, allying with European monarchs to attack France, and of the French bourgeoisie at the time of the Commune (1871) to illustrate that law. Moreover, having registered a number of historical examples proving the 'betrayal' of the French nation by the bourgeoisie (the Commune, Munich, Vichy and the Atlantic Pact) the PCF then proceeded to absolutise the 'anti-national' character of the bourgeoisie.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Party's analysis, the French bourgeoisie had definitely departed from the nation and forsaken it. The PCF unilaterally stressed the 'cosmopolitan' aspect of the bourgeoisie, neglecting its dual character. It failed to notice the existence of a French bourgeoisie which was anxious to preserve its own French interests against US or German rivalry. The French bourgeoisie which was alive and kicking was regarded by the Party as unimportant on the national scene.

What the Party saw as a definitive 'divorce' between the bourgeoisie and the nation served a clear purpose: it purified the French nation from reactionary aspects since the reactionary class had abandoned it. At the same time, for the PCF, the French nation also gained in value since the above-mentioned law stated that the progressive class, i.e. the working class, had taken over the national banner. 'In every country the working class is the upholder of the national interest.'<sup>8</sup>

Through this 'law' the Party inevitably presented the nation as an inherently 'progressive' reality which it was the task of progressive classes to carry forward, as they would social progress for instance. What was national had to be progressive: this came as a natural conclusion. At least this is what the PCF tried to make out, arguing that the progressive and national characters of the working class had always been intimately linked. In order to prove this point, it subjected quotations by Marx and Engels to a most original interpretation:

The national and progressive role of the working class is expressed through the objectives and the very character of its struggle:

'This struggle has reached a stage where the exploited class (the proletariat) can no longer liberate itself from the class which is exploiting and oppressing it without liberating, at the same time and once and for all the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles'. [Engels]

It is only in the name of the common rights of society that a particular class can claim overall supremacy.

[Marx]<sup>9</sup>

Engels referred to the fact that the proletariat had to free the whole of society from exploitation in its struggle for emancipation. In Marx's statement, the proletariat can only have a claim to 'general supremacy' for the same reason. Nowhere is the nation mentioned. In Marxist thought it is very clearly its class structure that should enable the proletariat to bring an end to exploitation and to liberate humanity, not its national quality. And yet the PCF takes Marx and Engels' statements to mean that the proletariat's historical role consists of freeing the nation and holding up its interests. According to Roger

Garaudy, the proletariat regards it as a 'mission' to serve the nation and to ensure its future and its grandeur, rather than use the national framework as a convenient theatre for its battle against exploitation and oppression.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time as substituting 'nation' for 'society' (as shown above) the Party often equated 'nation' to 'people': 'The unity, strength and the thriving of the motherland are threatened as soon as one privileged class sets its own interests against those of the nation with the sole purpose of maintaining its privileges against the whole of the people.'<sup>11</sup>

For the PCF, nation and people have become practically interchangeable. This confusion between nation and people may be one of the key concepts explaining the new attributes bestowed on the nation by the PCF; the Party wrongly applied to the nation what was perhaps valid for the people, for instance the fact that the exploiting class/ruling class had detached itself from the people.

### **The Proletariat Becomes the Nation**

Altogether one would be justified in saying that the PCF's elaborations on the nation lacked depth and clarity. This impression is reinforced by a study of its analysis of the relationship between the proletariat and the nation. The French Communist Party, which considered itself as the Party of the proletariat, in the Marxist tradition, also claimed to be the Party of the nation, 'the only authentically national party'.<sup>12</sup> The terms of 'nation' and 'proletariat' often occur simultaneously in tandem in PCF statements, revealing a certain kinship. A simple explanation is advanced by the Party: the fact that the working class 'tends to become the nation'.<sup>13</sup>

Both Laurent Casanova and Roger Garaudy submitted the Communist Manifesto to a fresh study,<sup>14</sup> with the aim of refuting as obsolete Marx's historical words 'workers have no motherland'. They argued that this formula was applicable to the absolute destitution of the proletariat in the mid-nineteenth century, but that the situation had changed since then: the working class had strengthened itself in numbers, in organisation and in class consciousness, and could participate in the national life. For the Party, there was no contradiction left between the proletarian and national interests, which in its

view on occasions almost became synonymous. The theme of the proletariat as the driving force of French national unity ran through most basic PCF texts such as congress theses or theoretical texts. The Party generally did not accept that there could be a bourgeois interpretation of the word 'national'. It remarked that the bourgeoisie tried to portray a number of 'enterprises' as national, but those were nothing of the sort, said the PCF; they were in fact 'anti-national' (e.g. colonial enterprises).

The real national interests, according to the Party, corresponded to a proletarian interpretation of the term, and it acted in conformity with this assumption. In its 14th and 15th Congresses,<sup>15</sup> a programme of renovation of the French national economy was introduced, making an optimum use of French resources, encompassing investments in productive industries and in education, for the benefit of the national interest. The 1959 congress proposed in greater detail the development of energy resources and industry, such as machine tools, electronics and building industries, in order to safeguard French interests and independence. This comprehensive programme was meant to further the proletariat/nation's interest. The PCF kept acting as though it was on the brink of ruling France. But one cannot help drawing attention to the contradiction between the PCF's wishful thinking and the reality of the situation. In 1959, the political power was undoubtedly well in the hands of the bourgeoisie – in imperialist France – which would not fail to wield it to harness any economic development in France to its own interests. In practice the Party's discourse and proposals merely caused confusion among the French 'masses' as to the real nature of the state.

## THE *OPPOSITIONNELS* AND THE NATION

Most *oppositionnel* reviews concerned themselves with the rampant racialism and chauvinism unleashed by the Algerian war. A number of articles were written pointing out the danger of allowing nationalism and colonialist ideology to spread unhampered. In their view, the PCF's response to these phenomena was inadequate and inefficient: it indulged in a complacent attitude towards the French nation, neglecting the task of



exposing French imperialism and the ensuing chauvinist prejudices.<sup>16</sup>

### **The French Nation: a Bourgeois Nation**

Thus the more theoretical publications such as *Voies Nouvelles* were lead to delve into the Party's approach to the nation, which according to them caused a number of illusions and misunderstandings. Maurice Caveing, an *oppositionnel*, found it necessary to state the bourgeois nature of the French nation.<sup>17</sup> The nation, he said, was an organic entity. Hence the capitalist socio-economic formation in France expressed itself in a specific ideology which permeated the whole nation. He added that nationalism, as a component of that ideology, pervaded the spontaneous consciousness of the working masses, leading up to the conclusion that only an organised and conscious vanguard could combat nationalism. France's attempt to preserve its colonial empire through a war in Algeria exacerbated chauvinism. The Party as 'vanguard' bore a special responsibility in the struggle against the chauvinism which prevailed in France, and Maurice Caveing blames it for neglecting this task. He accused the PCF of bringing confusion to its own members and the French masses, because it had lost sight of the basic analysis of the French nation which he, Maurice Caveing, had just re-emphasised.

Subsequent issues of *Voies Nouvelles* elaborated on the theme that the PCF spread illusions among the French people about their 'own' imperialism. The Party propaganda stressed the US so much as the main enemy of the French masses that the French bourgeoisie was portrayed as a negligible quantity. *Voies Nouvelles* convincingly argued that the Party's policy of national independence against the USA accompanied with a concert of praises for the French national heritage and its democratic traditions, together with references to the Rights of Man and republican ideals masked the reality of France as an imperialist country.<sup>18</sup> This was a very judicious remark. *Voies Nouvelles* also quoted the example of the pre-First World War period to demonstrate how the bourgeoisie was skilful at taking advantage of republican ideals to fool its class enemy:

The imperialist bourgeoisie proclaimed the 'sacred Union'

in the name of republican ideals and in the memory of 1789 to face aggressive and reactionary imperial Germany. The internationalist resolutions of socialist Congresses then melted like snow in the sun at the evocation of a France which was democratic, which was the motherland of liberty, the liberator of the oppressed, the rescuer of victims of oppression.<sup>19</sup>

According to *l'Étincelle*, the Algerian war was a case in point where the bourgeois use of national myths was assisted by the very propaganda of the PCF; 'National grandeur only brings water to the mill of chauvinism.'<sup>20</sup>

The *oppositionnels* voiced further criticisms particularly of the Party's policy regarding the colonies. In their opinion, long developments on the preservation of the 'French presence' in the colonial territories, emphasis on the possibility of equal relationship and friendship between France and its 'overseas territories' within the French Union, and the promotion of permanent links between France and its colonies over and above any other consideration, all these aspects of the Party's line on the colonies gilded the image of French imperialism.<sup>21</sup> It was thereby coloured into a gentle more acceptable imperialism; in the last analysis one could have drawn the conclusion that it was hardly imperialist at all.

Jean Gérôme's (alias Jean-Pierre Vernant) criticisms reached a higher degree of severity; he accused the Party of objectively colluding with the bourgeoisie:

The logic behind this strategy meant that absolute priority was always granted to that which reinforced French independence from the United States rather than to struggles of independence waged by the colonies against France. In the case of the Algerian affair this then led the PC to adopt positions which in the final analysis were closer to those of the French bourgeoisie than to those of the Algerian people.<sup>22</sup>

Jean Gérôme's conclusion is very clear: the Party's political choice to give 'absolute priority' to French national independence against the USA led it to side with the French bourgeoisie rather than the Algerian people.

Further studies of Party documents copiously confirm the *oppositionnels'* allegations that the PCF underestimated the

nature and strength of French imperialism. Georges Cogniot even utilised Lenin's polemic with Rosa Luxemburg on the national question in order to justify the campaign for French national sovereignty against US imperialism.<sup>23</sup>

In an attempt to prove the correctness of the Party line on French national independence, Georges Cogniot brought in Lenin, saying that national wars against imperialist powers were progressive and revolutionary. When he wrote these words, Lenin was referring to national liberation movements in the colonies or oppressed nations fighting against imperialism. This could only apply to the French situation if one assumed that France was a colony of the USA.

### **The PCF Nourishes Nationalism**

Since the PCF underestimated the bourgeoisie's strength, it was consequently unable to make an accurate appreciation of the proletariat's influence, as both counterparts exist and act relatively to each other in a dynamic whole. Misconceptions about their relative position reinforce each other and lead to greater inaccuracy in the respective evaluation of the bourgeoisie and proletariat poised against each other. The *oppositionnels* were greatly alarmed by the Party statements on the proletariat and the nation. *L'Étincelle* believed that Laurent Casanova had lost sight of the class contradiction itself between proletariat and nation, making them indistinguishable from each other, and that in reality, the bourgeoisie was part of the nation which therefore could not be identified with the proletariat.<sup>24</sup>

*L'Étincelle* also charged that Laurent Casanova had doctored the Communist Manifesto so that it fitted in with his own interpretation of the relationship between nation and proletariat. *L'Étincelle* shows how Casanova, quoting the Manifesto which stated that the proletariat must constitute itself as the nation, carried out a little surgery which considerably altered the meaning of the text: he left out the section specifying that the proletariat must first seize power<sup>25</sup> before it becomes nation. This cancels out the validity of the statement as far as France is concerned, because the proletariat had not yet seized power. 'The underlying reason for this systematic misrepresentation of Marxist thought makes itself clear here: to progress gradually towards the assertion that, in France, as in the USSR, the

proletariat is already the dominant class, identifiable with the nation.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Victor Leduc argued that a policy of identification between proletariat and nation led to the denial of the class struggle.<sup>27</sup>

In his endeavour to answer the *oppositionnels*, Jacques Arnault denied the connotation of 'chauvinism' attributed to the phrase 'national interest'. In a brief historical retrospective, he explained how the Party in its infancy made a break with nationalism and rejected everything national. He implied that this stage of Party development was a necessary 'infantile disorder'. Such an attitude has become outmoded, said Jacques Arnault; in point of fact, he went on, the Party had, by 1958, striven for 25 years to assess 'national values' in conformity, with a proletariat interpretation of the term.<sup>28</sup> Rejecting all national values nowadays would amount to national nihilism, argued Jacques Arnault, clearly pointing at *Voies Nouvelles*.

Jacques Arnault's remarks only give a partial answer to the *oppositionnels*. His sweeping statement against national nihilism did not really apply to the review under attack, i.e. *Voies Nouvelles*. *Voies Nouvelles* merely underlined the bourgeois nature of the French nation and called for more discretion in the glorification of French 'national grandeur'. Indeed, it is relatively easy to recognise the need to nurse 'proletarian' national values; the difficulty lies in the definition of what constitutes such a value. The debate therefore needed to concern itself with the choice of national values to be upheld by communists. This cannot be done in the abstract but only with careful consideration given to the concrete historical circumstances. The Party did not appear to do so. On the contrary, *oppositionnel* reviews generally made their objections very specific, taking into account the significance of a particular slogan in the context of a particular situation: 'To call for a policy of "French grandeur" in the present situation leans towards serving the interests of imperialism.'<sup>29</sup> Eventually history would confirm that *l'Étincelle* was not mistaken.

In its letter to the Party leadership<sup>30</sup> the cell Sorbonne Lettres precisely relied on its observation of events (De Gaulle's popularity) to criticise the Party: Sorbonne Lettres argued that De Gaulle was objectively helped by the PCF's policy on the French nation and the colonies.<sup>31</sup>

Commenting on the 'defection of more than one and a half million communist voters' who voted in favour of De Gaulle, Sorbonne Lettres severely incriminated the Party for the 'wave of nationalism' sweeping over France. The cell considered that the PCF's appeal for the defence of the 'national interest' had contributed to De Gaulle's overwhelming success. Obligated to acknowledge the existence of a 'chauvinist trend' amongst the French people and a section of the working class as it was impossible to deny it in view of the referendum results, the Party refused to accept any of the blame cast upon itself by Sorbonne Lettres. Instead, it produced another explanation for its failure against De Gaulle. The 15th Congress of the PCF quoted Marx to remind its members and its critics that the 'ruling ideas were the ideas of the ruling class': 'Colonialist and chauvinist trends have influenced the people and even a part of the working class.'<sup>32</sup>

The *oppositionnels* had to agree with this statement. They had themselves written extensive articles on the material basis of nationalism in *Voies Nouvelles* and other journals. The PCF had refused to pay any heed to their warnings against rampant nationalism in France. Consequently, the *oppositionnels* were not appeased by the Party's explanations and its belated discovery that nationalism was 'taught in primary schools'. *Voies Nouvelles* found, in the PCF declaration, a fresh opportunity to castigate its lack of ideological struggle against 'the ruling ideas', i.e. nationalism.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the conclusion that 'chauvinism' was mostly taught in primary schools remains questionable. Quite to the contrary, opinion polls from 1958 show that opposition to Algerian independence was directly proportionate to the level of education.<sup>34</sup>

This whole polemic proves again that the PCF had not sufficiently taken into account the imperialist nature of France and all its implications for the French working class. The Party could not even plead ignorance since its mentor, Lenin, had correctly observed the penetration of 'social chauvinism' among the ranks of the workers; according to his analysis of imperialism, the bourgeoisie could afford to 'buy off' some sections of the working class through 'crumbs' from the superprofit yielded by colonial exploitation.<sup>35</sup> Had the PCF matched its policies with the theory it professed to follow it would have been more

careful in its handling of 'national values' for fear that 'French national grandeur and influence' be interpreted as a slogan encouraging French colonialism.

PCF patriotism and national pride were outstanding features of Party policy from 1936 onwards. They blossomed fully during the Second World War in the struggle against the Nazi occupation of France. *Tribune Marxiste* quoted a Party brochure published during the war to show that the Party bordered on chauvinism:

France which is present in Algiers and Tunis as much as Marseille, France which safeguards the great interest of civilisation and the necessary balance in the Eastern Mediterranean can only consider the Mediterranean sea as its own territorial waters . . . The larger France has more than 110 million inhabitants.<sup>36</sup>

The PCF continued to uphold French 'grandeur' in the fifties and early sixties throughout the Algerian war, although this episode of French history could hardly be glorified. The Party put forward an additional argument to justify its position: the desire not to hurt the national feeling of the 'profoundly patriotic' French people. The *oppositionnels* had but one word to describe this attitude: 'opportunism'. They also accused the Party of nationalism, a more 'pernicious' one than that of the right wing, because it was convinced that it remained immune to nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

It appears from this study that the PCF leadership itself was profoundly patriotic; it genuinely felt for the glory of France and considered itself the repository of the French heritage; there is no doubt that Party members had studied the very same school history books that had been blamed for the influence of chauvinism among the working class. What rendered the matter more serious, and what gave the *oppositionnels* greater cause for concern, was that the Party attempted to produce philosophical justifications for its approach. Hence its analysis of the relationship between nation and proletariat; this in turn reinforced the Party's beliefs in the grandeur and mission of France. This confused line on the question of France and the French nation constitutes a very large part of the explanation for the PCF's confused and paradoxical position on the Algerian war itself.

The theoretical confusion between the nation and the people was a key problem in the PCF's approach. If the French proletariat identified itself with the French nation and vice versa, as could be construed from an exegesis of a few theoretical documents, anything furthering the 'national' interests had to be supported, in the eyes of the PCF, since the interests of the proletariat converged with the interests of the nation.

The Party met resistance from its own members on all these issues. But the *oppositionnels* do not appear to have gained great success in influencing the Party line, though their criticisms were sufficient to justify official answers and explanations on the part of leading circles of the PCF, which reasserted the Party line.

# 5 The PCF and the Algerian Nation

## THE PCF AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN THE COLONIES

The length and breadth of the Algerian liberation war waged against France brought the Algerian question to the forefront even more so than other anti-colonialist movements. A debate developed within the Party throughout the Algerian war. The PCF ostentatiously proclaimed its fidelity to the principle of the right of nations to self-determination, i.e. to independence.<sup>1</sup> However, the Party's declarations on the right of nations to self-determination were regularly followed by a number of qualifications which argued the case against the separation of nations. Sheltering behind Lenin's polemic with Rosa Luxemburg the Party liked to quote that 'the right to divorce in no way meant the obligation to get divorced'.<sup>2</sup> In other words the PCF upheld the right to self-determination for nations but carefully reserved its judgement as to whether it should uphold separation itself. This generally implied that the Party in reality disapproved of separation. The Party liked to quote Lenin again and again in order to explain and support its own position, perhaps as a safeguard against possible criticisms. Léon Feix stressed here that, in Lenin's very words, the separation of nations' colonies from the mother country must be decided as a function of the 'general struggle'.<sup>3</sup> This quotation secured the possibility for the PCF to decide against separation.

The *oppositionnels* challenged the Party and claimed that it had denied even the right of nations to self-determination. Independence appeared to have been permanently postponed: *Voies Nouvelles* showed how in 1936, 1945, 1947 and in 1954 union with France rather than secession was recurrently selected as the optimum solution.<sup>4</sup> 'Implementing' Leninism, the PCF interpreted the struggle against imperialism as though it meant that Algeria should not gain its independence from France. 'At the present time and for reasons already mentioned the independence of Algeria would constitute both an illusion



and a consolidation of the bases of imperialism in Algeria.<sup>5</sup> The PCF thereby established a distinction between the camp of imperialism as a world system headed by the USA and France itself. For Léon Feix, if Algeria became independent from France to fall under the control of US imperialism, it would strengthen imperialism on a world scale. Therefore independence for Algeria was not seen as a desirable solution by the PCF.

For the *oppositionnels* advocating the independence of Algeria, the Party's fear of US hegemony had led to an erroneous conclusion. According to *Tribune Marxiste* the Algerians must combat the imperialist country which directly oppressed them and were entitled to the full support of the French Communist Party.<sup>6</sup> For Jean Baby, the best way of protecting the Algerians against US deception or aggression was to steel them in their struggle against French imperialism.<sup>7</sup>

Let the FLN speak for itself in answer to the PCF's anxieties:

As peoples free themselves from European colonialism, America, which is emerging as the heir of the old colonialist powers, is increasingly forced to divest its anti-colonialist mask to show its true colours to the peoples it has been able to deceive or tried to deceive.<sup>8</sup>

*Tribune Marxiste* rejected any possible justification of the Party's position. In any case, these *oppositionnels* argued, it was not the prerogative of the French Communist Party to decide whether Algeria should secede or not; as a communist party active in the imperialist mother country, its sole task was that of agitating for the right to self-determination in order to fulfil its internationalist duty.<sup>9</sup> Most of the *oppositionnels* concluded that the PCF ought to have upheld the slogan of independence for Algeria earlier than it did (early 1957) and more vigorously.<sup>10</sup>

The Party appears to have felt uncomfortable about its position. Ten years later Elie Mignot made an apologetic reference to criticisms concerning the Party's lack of commitment for Algerian independence.<sup>11</sup> The PCF had indeed demanded the recognition of the right to 'liberty' for the Algerian people on 8 November 1954.<sup>12</sup>

Both the Party and its critics knew exactly the significance of such a choice of term: liberty rather than independence.

The semantic distinction between the two may not appear outstandingly important. However, they reflect two different realities: liberty may mean a democratisation of institutions and a number of democratic rights; it may indicate the elimination of repression but does not necessarily imply the political secession which is expressed by 'independence'. Algerian nationalists fought for the independence of Algeria. The French ruling class itself was well aware of the difference. The anecdote of the encounter between Ho Chi Minh and d'Argenlieu is worth recalling in this context: the main obstacle to an agreement consisted of a single word, the French general insisting on the 'liberty of Vietnam' and the Vietnamese leader demanding that 'the independence of Vietnam' be stated in the agreement. They eventually settled for the Vietnamese term which luckily combined both meanings and left it vague.<sup>13</sup>

Elie Mignot attempted to justify the Party's policy; he invoked the need to protect the Party publications from censorship.<sup>14</sup> This argument bore little persuasive power for the *oppositionalists* since the Party later paid little heed to censorship, upholding the right of Algeria to independence from 1957 onwards, whereas repression was continuously on the increase. Elie Mignot was much more convincing when he quoted the colonialist ideology prevalent in France, which necessitated a very careful approach on the part of the Party:

The majority of the French people remained under the influence of colonialist ideology. Given this situation the main task consisted of raising gradually the awareness of our people as to a precise understanding of this problem and of the need to work for peace and for the independence of Algeria.<sup>15</sup>

The colonialist ideology of the French people was not indeed a negligible quantity and had to be counted in the PCFs strategy. The Party claimed to have 'moderated' its slogans – 'liberty' rather than 'independence', 'Algerian national phenomenon' instead of Algerian nation – with the aim of winning over the French people to the Algerian cause. The *oppositionalists* would call this attitude 'opportunist' and argue that a clear-cut position in favour of independence and a continuous propaganda exposing French imperialism in Algeria concretely would have been more effective in the uprooting of

colonialist prejudice among the French people – all the more as it was to be confirmed by their own bitter experience of a dreadful war.

But the real question still has to be answered: was the PCF itself wholeheartedly, uncompromisingly, in favour of Algerian independence? A number of elements reveal considerable hesitation from the Party on the question of independence.

In the first place, it appears that for a long time the Party did not select 'independence' as the best formula. It argued that a continued relationship, on a new basis, between France and its overseas territories would best serve the interests of both. The Party believed that a positive role could be played by France in the leading of overseas territories to economic and political maturity. The PCF had faith in the French 'grandeur' and felt a genuine concern for 'France's interest' which could benefit from the retention of links with its overseas territories. This line of thought tends to indicate that the Party postponed taking up the slogan of Algerian independence because it did not want to promote independence, rather than on account of 'colonialist ideology' amongst the French masses or in order to avoid 'the traps of censorship'.

Another element seems to have motivated the PCF's hesitations regarding Algerian independence: the nature of the Algerian movement's leadership, which was not proletarian. The Party was not ready to give unqualified support to the FLN. The PCF took a very long time before acknowledging the FLN as representative of the Algerian people; as late as 1959, the Party Congress did not cite the FLN in its theses. In his political report, Maurice Thorez spoke of political negotiation with 'the representatives of the Algerians against whom we have been fighting for four years and a half'.<sup>16</sup> He thereby used a periphrase rather than naming the Algerian people's representatives or the national liberation organisation. In the same Congress, the GPRA was not mentioned at all, although it had been founded on 19 September 1958 in Cairo. (However, both had been mentioned in other Party publications in 1958.)

This careful approach can be contrasted with the Party's declarations during the war in Indo-China. Pierre Cot had not hesitated to name the leader of the Indo-Chinese Liberation Movement in his speech to the National Assembly. His appeal was 'Negotiate with Ho Chi Minh'.<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, Ho Chi Minh

was an international communist figurehead, and the liberation movement in Indo-China was led by communists. This was not the case for the Algerian national liberation struggle. The attitude of the PCF definitely expressed distrust towards the FLN. This caution and distrust were compounded with the PCF's concern for French settlers in Algeria. The following section on the Algerian nation demonstrates the paramount importance accorded to the settlers by the PCF.

As a whole, one might construe a certain reluctance on the part of the PCF to consider the Algerian problem as a clear case of a national liberation struggle versus imperialism. The Party generally gave priority to broad democratic or economic demands to the detriment of the national question: equal status for Algerians of all origin, democratic rights for Arab-Berbers, improvements in wages and conditions of work for both Arab-Berbers and settlers' populations.<sup>18</sup>

One could even say that the PCF preferred to encourage an alliance or rather a merger between French 'working' settlers and the Arab-Berber working masses against a handful of colonialists,<sup>19</sup> and that to an extent, the Arab-Berber bourgeoisie was also looked upon with distrust by the PCF.<sup>20</sup> Was this attitude the sequel of a 'Second Internationalist' influence which feared the independence of Algeria because it might take Algeria back in the history of human progress, whereas the benefits of French culture and democracy could take it forward?<sup>21</sup> There is no absolute evidence that this is the case. And yet my study of the PCF's conception of the Algerian nation, which is to come in the following section, reveals undertones that could confirm such an interpretation of the PCF's attitude. The *oppositionnels* on the contrary stressed the solidarity between the Algerian national liberation movement (the FLN) and the French working class against French imperialism. They saw this line of cleavage as the primary one and criticised the Party for not making it absolutely clear to its readers and followers.<sup>22</sup>

This whole question assumed special importance at the end of the fifties and the early sixties as it constituted one of the axes of disagreement within the International Communist Movement. The 1957 declaration of Communist Parties did underline the significance of the rising storms in the colonies. The question was taken further by the Communist Party of

China. Some of the *oppositionnel* reviews, such as *La Voie Communiste*, published the Chinese texts; other *oppositionnels* discussed such texts carefully in Party cell meetings: the École Normale Supérieure Saint-Cloud cell as early as 1956 debated the English issues of *Peking Review* in April 1956.<sup>23</sup> To the Soviet line arguing that the struggle against a possible world war and for disarmament absorbed all others, the Chinese Party answered that national liberation struggles must not be treated as secondary matters.

These international divergences translated themselves within the PCF into slogans for 'peace' in Algeria versus 'independence', the official line naturally promoting the former. *L'Étincelle*, which consistently upheld the slogan of Algerian independence, also emphasised the need to attach high priority to support for national liberation struggles: 'But one had to understand that after the Second World War the Achilles' heel of the French bourgeoisie was its colonial system.'<sup>24</sup>

Altogether a number of reasons motivated the PCF's reluctance to throw all its weight in favour of Algerian independence: its concern for French national interest, its desire not to shock the profoundly patriotic French people, its faith in the generosity of the French nation, the responsibility it perceived as its own *vis-à-vis* the settlers, its lack of trust in the FLN and its fidelity to the Soviet world outlook. For the PCF all those reasons converged towards the same end: the postponement of Algerian independence. The *oppositionnels* in their majority disagreed with the Party on all those points, and held up 'independence' as a key slogan which epitomised their position on the Algerian question. It is interesting to note that the Party subsequently felt the need to retract on its earlier statements, changing their meaning retrospectively. Leon Feix in *l'Humanité* (19 November 1963) claimed in the face of all the evidence that the Party had all the time meant independence for Algeria.

Having presented this brief theoretical overview of the overall issue, attention must now be turned to the Party's theory of the Algerian nation.

## THE ALGERIAN NATION

**The Theory of the PCF**

Algeria had always occupied a privileged place amongst the French colonies. As has been shown in the first chapter of this book, Algeria was the most closely associated with the 'mother country'. It was considered as an integral part of France by the French government and many French people. It was, for the PCF itself, a special case: 'Algeria is a colony of a particular type.'<sup>25</sup> The Party took a particular interest in the Algerian case. For Algeria and Algeria alone did it elaborate a theory of the nation, as early as 1939. The main reason for such a privilege was clearly the presence on Algerian soil of one million French settlers alongside the several million Arabs and Berbers.<sup>26</sup> By sheer weight of numbers, the settlers differentiated themselves from the few thousand settlers in Morocco or Tunisia. In their status too they differed radically from the mobile civil servants who constituted the colonial apparatus in Sub-Saharan Africa. These people were unattached to any particular territory and considered themselves as expatriate Frenchmen when they took up work in the 'colony'. Moreover, the support enjoyed amongst French settlers by the PCF section in Algeria (which became the PCA after 1936) was by no means negligible. In 1951, 22 per cent of the settlers voted for the PCA programme in the legislative elections.<sup>27</sup>

The Party's theory on the Algerian nation attempted to accommodate these numerous settlers in an original manner, and this theoretical development constituted one of the underlying components of the Party's policy on Algeria. The question was not straightforward, and added fuel to the internal debate over Algeria. It is therefore well worth studying the various conceptions formulated around this subject.

Maurice Thorez inaugurated the theory of the 'Algerian nation in formation' in a speech in Algiers on 11 February 1939; this speech remained the basic reference point for the PCF. It was to be elaborated on by subsequent articles, thus assuming great historical significance.

*The French nation and Algeria*

Before proceeding to define the Algerian nation itself, Thorez, in his speech, revealed areas of uncertainty concerning the nature of Algeria's national characteristics. He openly expressed certain views which may well have been interpreted as identifying Algeria with France:

When I speak of Frenchmen from Algeria, I mean all of you present here, all of you who are French of origin, French through naturalisation, those of you who are Jewish and also those Arab and Berber Moslems, you are sons, if not by blood then at least in your hearts, of the great French Revolution.<sup>28</sup>

Such reference to the French Revolution in the late thirties was by no means rare in PCF speech. However, in that specific context, on Algerian soil, the slogan of a France 'one and indivisible' could be politically misleading and historically anachronistic. This passage from Thorez's speech, which was quoted again and again in Party documents during the Algerian war, provoked sharp criticism from the *oppositionnels*.<sup>29</sup> The Party had displayed its jacobinism; but jacobinism corresponded to a particular period in the formation of the French nation itself. When the bourgeois revolution and the Republic did away with feudalism, the Jacobins laid the foundation for a nationalist ethic in France; the unity of the French nation had to be cemented politically and ideologically, all the more so as the enemy was threatening its borders. The jacobinism of the eighteenth century assumed a different significance in the twentieth century. The Jacobin doctrine was used to further the aims of French imperialism and justify the annexation of the colonies. This is the rationale behind Serge Weinstock's criticism which implied that Thorez himself, in Algiers, white-washed these enterprises and endorsed them, as he spoke the same language as non-communist and bourgeois politicians. Further criticisms were levelled at Thorez's speech: in a later study Jacques Jurquet accused him of advancing an assimilationist policy.<sup>30</sup> Jacobinism and assimilationism pertained to the same ideology. It had guided France to nationhood as it was to guide her to Empire. The overall declared aim was to turn the *indigènes* into Frenchmen, culturally and politically, and to incorporate the territory they inhabited into the French

state and nation. Assimilationism meant the denial of all indigenous national character, or the forcible elimination of such character. Emmanuel Sivan, in his study of the PCA, on the other hand, claims that Maurice Thorez's prime concern was the threat of fascism. According to Sivan, Thorez was endeavouring to strike an emotional chord among the settlers, by reminding them of the 1789 ideals of democracy and equality, in order to counter fascist influences; he was thus associating Arabs, Berbers, Jews and Frenchmen alike in the defence of those ideals pointing out their 'common' interest in the preservation of peace and liberty.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation could conceivably be born out by the existence of concrete Italian and Spanish claims over North Africa at the time. Laurent Casanova in his article 'After Maurice Thorez's visit to Algeria' mentioned the specific menace of fascism for Algeria: 'Franco is in Morocco, Mussolini in Tripolitania.'<sup>32</sup>

Yet the PCF's attitude towards the Algerian nation remained confused and confusing. Laurent Casanova, in 1939, emphasised the close links between Algeria and France rather than the separate identity of the Algerian nation.<sup>33</sup> He clearly stressed all the factors that united France and Algeria such as the presence of French settlers and what he saw as a process of assimilation of the Arab-Berber and Jewish populations.

Those who are of French origin or who have become French have been settled there [Algeria] for generations. Not all of them are tied in with the bureaucracy, with the structures of authority or with the forces of colonial control. Not all of them are powerful settlers who expropriate land and not all of them represent the influential banks and trusts which have monopolised the sources of raw material. They are, for the most part, manual workers, workers in the public services, white collar employees and civil servants. They benefit from a political system modelled upon that in metropolitan France. The structures of government in Algeria come under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior rather than under the Colonial Office. As a result of contacts which were established, urban populations of Arab-Berber or Jewish origins are in the process of becoming assimilated. This process of assimilation is at a particularly advanced stage amongst the petty and urban bourgeoisies.<sup>34</sup>



Casanova established political cleavages along class lines rather than national lines: the majority of settlers are opposed to the 'big settlers who expropriate' who are the potential agents of fascism. As for the Arab-Berbers' 'national' organisations, they are envisaged with distrust by the PCF which suspected some of them of collaboration with fascism<sup>35</sup> (in reality no such collaboration was ever proven). Casanova notes that they all share the same 'social content': they represent the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie. The PCF indicates that the important strata to be taken into consideration by communists is the 'Arab workers'.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of Thorez's and Casanova's writings, one could already draw the conclusion that they both consciously or unconsciously selected the theoretical elements which supported their political strategy, that they built a picture of Algeria suited to their policy of unity against fascism. A careful study of the other aspects of the PCF theory concerning the Algerian nation is needed for a better understanding of the problem.

*Algeria: 'nation in formation'*

The original feature to be quoted by subsequent PCF publications was the nature of Algeria as a 'nation in formation', a concept inaugurated by Maurice Thorez in his speech about Algeria in 1939. The composition of the Algerian nation-to-be merits special attention. In his 1939 speech Thorez recalled the genesis of the French nation<sup>37</sup> as a parallel to that of Algeria: 'There is an Algerian nation which is also being constituted through the mixing of twenty races.'<sup>38</sup>

Reviewing the history of migrations and invasions on Algerian soil, he included amongst the components having equal claim to the title of artisans of the Algerian nation, Numids, Romans, Berbers, Arabs, Jews and Turks alike, as well as European settlers of Spanish, Italian and French origins. No qualitative difference was posited between these groups. His formulation erased the distinction between the oppressed colonised section of the population and the settlers, and merged them all into a crucible as if they already constituted a cohesive entity. The notion of 'twenty races' proved extremely durable even after the PCF began to define Algerian society as composed of two main groups. René Gallissot identifies Maurice Thorez's theory as the last offshoot of 'colonial

socialism'<sup>39</sup> (among Tunisian socialists). Such socialism believed in the 'civilising mission' of French colonisation through the merger of all the races on North African soil, so that the settlers had an important role to play in the national edification. Gallissot compared it to the PCF's 'nation in formation'. According to him the Party thereby betrayed the sequel of its 'second internationalist' past.

The process of the formation of the Algerian nation was further expounded by other prominent PCF officials. After the Second World War the concept of 'twenty races' gave way to the merger between two main groups: the Arab-Berber population on the one hand, the European settlers on the other. Although the composition of the nation through the mixture of twenty races was never refuted and occasionally reappeared until 1956, most texts emphasised the existence of two principal elements. Such a modification of the 'nation in formation' theory can be explained by developments taking place in the Algerian situation, which the Party could not ignore. The polarisation of the Algerian populations into two groups had become more evident. Arab-Berber nationalist organisations increased their influence which translated itself into a major electoral success; shortly after the war, a showdown between communist lists and the UDMA resulted in 72 per cent of the votes being cast in favour of the UDMA.<sup>40</sup> Arabs and Berbers thus proved that they had to be taken into account as a separate single group.

André Marty, reasserting the claim of all the inhabitants of Algeria to contribute to its formation as a nation, stated the existence of two main groups in 1946. He liked to quote the PCA on 'the Algerian nation in formation' as a 'happy mixture of oriental and occidental civilisations', which referred to the Arab-Berber populations on one side, the settlers on the other: 'Algerians of all origins, we are already creating a stable community within our common land. We are linked by common general interests and by the struggle against the same enemies.'<sup>41</sup>

It is necessary to quote further sections of André Marty's speech in order to understand who are the 'common enemies' of all the Algerians:

Thus the trusts which have no motherland, the men of the

two hundred families, who openly betrayed France as soon as Hitler came to power (1933), who ignominiously collaborated with the Nazis before and during the occupation, those who have done everything to prevent the economic recovery of France after Liberation, these enemies of the French nation are at the same time ruthless exploiters of the Muslim and European Algerian populations. They are the men of colonialism.<sup>42</sup>

The 'trusts', the 'two hundred families', the 'men of colonialism', are, according to André Marty, the oppressors of both settlers and Arab-Berbers. This approach is similar to Laurent Casanova's *Discours sur le voyage de Maurice Thorez en Algérie*, which opposed the majority of French settlers, workers, civil servants and public employees, to the 'big settlers who expropriate'. The PCF considered that the majority of settlers in Algeria were exploited and victims of colonialism, at the same time as the Arab-Berber working masses. This aspect of the PCF standpoint was to be challenged by a great number of *oppositionnels* who argued that the settlers enjoyed privileges directly related to colonialism.

The two main components of the Algerian nation, distinct from France, appear in a later speech by André Marty (1947)<sup>43</sup> reformulated into 'the Arab civilisation', the Arab-Berbers, and 'the modern democratic civilisation', the settlers.

*The settlers belong to the Algerian nation*

The settlers were evidently an essential element to be taken into consideration by the PCF in its analyses of the Algerian nation, and they soon became the focal point of the entire controversy surrounding its definition. The Party was caught between its 'socialist' duty of presenting Algeria as a colony rather than as a French *département* and what it considered to be its 'national' responsibility towards the settlers in Algeria. Thorez's 'nation in formation' enabled the PCF to conciliate both these tasks at least in the short term. On the one hand, the Party could positively deny that Algeria was part of France: 'Can one say that the bulk of the Algerian population has assimilated the language, traditions and customs of the French people, which would be the case if Algerians were part of the French Nation?'<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, it was not compelled to deny French settlers the right to remain in Algeria; the Party insisted that they were part and parcel of the Algerian nation 'in formation'. The settlers would belong to a newly forming entity which was different from France.

Being unaccomplished, the Algerian nation could find room to integrate the settlers. In 1955, the Party again claimed that both 'Arabs' and 'settlers' were equally worthy of building the Algerian nation.<sup>45</sup>

In 1956, the PCF coined a new phrase to describe the stage reached in the formation process of the Algerian nation: 'the Algerian national phenomenon'. 'The Algerian national phenomenon exists' announced Maurice Thorez in his political report at the 1956 congress, taking care to include the settlers: 'The Algerian population has, as a whole, reached national consciousness as is shown, in practice, by the attitude of many Europeans who are active supporters of national liberty. In the new Algeria there is room for all those who work whatever their ethnic origin.'<sup>46</sup>

At the beginning of 1957, Thorez declared that Algeria had become a 'formed nation', comprising Arab-Berbers and settlers: 'We have modified our form of words and we speak quite rightly of the Algerian national phenomenon, of the constituted Algerian nation whose reality rests upon the merging of elements of varied origins.'<sup>47</sup>

Algeria motivated the publication of additional writings. In April 1957 Marcel Dufriche published an article entitled *Le fait national algérien* in which he dwelt on the US 'desire' to take over France's place in Algeria. He also developed the customary theme of a merger between Arab-Berbers and settlers.<sup>48</sup> The year 1957 also witnessed the publication of Marcel Egretaud's booklet *Réalité de la nation algérienne*. Once again the same idea was reiterated: 'The bulk of Europeans settled in Algeria has become one of the constituent elements of the Algerian population.'<sup>49</sup>

Egretaud found a confirmation of his analysis in Charles-André Julien's assertion that the character of the population in the colony was 'the produce of an ethnic merger and of adaptation to the natural conditions of the country'.<sup>50</sup> However, Egretaud interpreted Charles-André Julien's description as though it applied to all the inhabitants of Algeria, Arab-

Berbers and settlers; Charles-André Julien, in reality, did not include the Arab-Berbers but attempted to define the settlers' population only. René Gallissot did not fail to notice this distortion of Julien's thought<sup>51</sup> and argued that Egretaud forcibly tried to include the settlers in the Algerian nation. According to Gallissot, the long list of ethnic groups settling on Algerian soil, given by Egretaud, masked a justification for the presence of French settlers.<sup>52</sup> Egretaud's historical presentation described the settling on Algerian soil of successive waves of outsiders, who came in as conquerors and thereafter merged with the autochtones, thus enriching the Algerian stock. Egretaud indicated that the settlers, like their predecessors, had an equal right to belong to the 'Algerian' nation, which they enriched.

*Analysis of the settlers' situation*

Up until the very end of the war the Party insisted on maintaining a special place for the European settlers within the Algerian nation. This notion was – and remained – a fundamental cornerstone of the PCF's theoretical approach to Algeria. Jacques Arnault, confirming the importance of the settlers, argued that the Algerian nation was not conceivable without them: 'The argument that the Algerian nation has always existed leads one to assert that Algeria is a "Muslim" nation. It does not take into account the particular character of this [European] immigrant population.'<sup>53</sup>

According to Jacques Arnault the Algerian nation could not possibly have existed before 1830, contrary to what was claimed by some Algerian nationalists, because this would render Algeria an exclusively 'Muslim' nation and therefore exclude the French settlers. Arnault does not bring in any further evidence to prove his point. The proposition 'settlers, part of the Algerian nation' had become the fundamental premise, whereas it still needed to be evidenced. The definition of the Algerian nation by the PCF was tailored accordingly so as to include the settlers. Jacques Arnault's argument is a circular one which takes for granted precisely what needed to be proved.

Marcel Dufriche in 1957 had advanced an additional argument intended to demonstrate that Algeria could not have been a 'formed' nation in 1939: the lack of a strong national consciousness.<sup>54</sup> Dufriche claimed that the Arab-Berbers and

the settlers had not yet become aware of their 'motherland', which indicated that the Algerian nation was still 'in formation'. If one accepted Dufriche's viewpoint, a difficulty was bound to arise if the Party wished to explain later developments. The 'national consciousness' of the Arab-Berbers became sufficiently evidenced by their mass participation in the emancipation struggle for Algeria's independence. Meanwhile the settlers continued to accept and welcome France's rule over Algeria, and showed no real sign of an 'Algerian' national consciousness. Did it mean that the Algerian nation was not 'formed' since the settlers, a part of it (in the eyes of the PCF), had not acquired an Algerian national consciousness? Or did it imply that the Algerian nation was 'formed' excluding the settlers? This the Party did not accept, even after it had officially recognised Algeria as a 'constituted nation'.

The Party endeavoured to support its theory of the Algerian nation, including the settlers, with two categories of arguments which appear to the careful reader of PCF texts as totally contradictory. In the first place, Marcel Dufriche, quoting Thorez, asserted that the settlers themselves had risen to national consciousness like the Arab-Berbers, citing the 'sacrifice of many settlers in the national liberation struggle'.<sup>55</sup> Historical exactitude compels us to note that the settlers never embraced the Algerian national liberation struggle as a group. Quite the contrary, they opposed it. A few individuals joined the struggle, and many of those were members of the PCA (Maillot, Laban, etc.).<sup>56</sup> Their action was probably not due to their attachment to the Algerian nation but rather to their political convictions.

Such optimism picturing the French settlers' community united with Arab-Berbers in the struggle for Algerian liberation does not appear to have satisfied party members. Jacques Arnault was entrusted with the task of explaining how French settlers could belong to the Algerian nation whilst remaining indifferent to the national liberation movement. Arnault's explanation clashes on a major issue with that of Dufriche. He does not attempt to claim that the settlers have any Algerian national consciousness as Dufriche did, but endeavours to supply the reasons why they lack it: 'Their patriotism was for a long time oriented towards their former motherland.'<sup>57</sup> Arnault accounts for the discrepancy between the settlers' and the

Arab-Berbers' attitude by the time lag between the 'objective reality' of the Algerian nation and the perception of this reality among its members: the Arab-Berbers were 'ahead of the objective reality', the settlers were 'late developers' in national consciousness. This interpretation allowed Arnault to present the settlers in their vast majority as members of the Algerian nation.<sup>58</sup>

Such conclusions inevitably attracted objections. The *oppositional* amply questioned the Party's analysis and this will be studied in the next section. Jacques Arnault acknowledged the existence 'of questions, incomprehension, objections even'<sup>59</sup> over the content of the Algerian nation.

Finally, Jacques Arnault made some concessions to his opponents. Noting that a large section of Algerians of European origin opposed the Algerian resistance in its struggle for 'national liberty', as the *ultras* plot demonstrated, he concluded: 'The point is not to turn the descendents of this immigrant population into Algerians at all cost. But it merely seems historically wrong – and politically dangerous – to exclude them from the national community out of principle.'<sup>60</sup>

The Party's analysis of the Algerian nation was never satisfactory. Maurice Thorez inaugurated the concept of 'nation in formation' for Algeria in 1939. Rather than carrying out a thorough analysis, Thorez appears to have proposed his definition in order to serve the Party's policy of union between Algeria and France in an anti-fascist front. Political preconceptions continued to dictate the Party's definition of the Algerian nation after the Second World War. It aimed to secure the continuation of links between Algeria and France and it was possessed by a persistent desire to integrate the French settlers into the Algerian nation. The PCF's approach was shown to be quite unscientific. Its theoretical elaborations on the Algerian nation should have proceeded from an unprejudiced observation of historical realities, without anticipating any given result. On the contrary, it appears that the Party first laid down its conclusions: Algeria was a nation in formation of which the settlers were an integral part. And thereafter, the Party tailored its theoretical developments to suit its policy and ideology. The fact that events increasingly contradicted the Party's assumptions, invalidating more and more its definition of the Algerian nation, did not lead the Party to modify

its position. It endeavoured to justify its analysis through the most acrobatic and sometimes self-contradictory explanations. It is little surprising that a number of criticisms were hurled at the PCF on this issue; they will constitute the main body of the next section.

### **An Alternative Definition of the Algerian nation**

The *oppositionnels* generally felt that the Party's theoretical pronouncements on the Algerian nation were both insufficiently researched and based on erroneous preconceptions. The *oppositionnel* reviews devoted a good many articles to the question of the Algerian nation and showed far greater concern for accuracy about the reality of the Algerian situation than is to be found in official Party publications. I have tried to put together the alternative picture of Algeria presented by the *oppositionnels* through a study of the different aspects or 'indices' (in Jean Dresch's words)<sup>61</sup> of the Algerian nation. According to the *oppositionnels*, its genesis was to be found in the study of history and a careful observation of contemporary Algeria. They strove to describe the development of the Arab-Berber population into a national community and attempted to demonstrate the failure of the merger between the Arab-Berbers and the settlers (under colonialism), which was one cornerstone of the PCF's theory.

The *oppositionnels* insisted on the Arab character of the Algerian nation, excluding the settlers, thus directly contradicting the definition of the Algerian nation in formation including the settlers put forward by the PCF. It seems useful in this study to use sources other than those of the PCF or *oppositionnels* in order to widen the scope of the debate. Individuals have been quoted such as Francis Jeanson, a left-wing intellectual who organised a clandestine network of support for the FLN; catholic intellectuals such as Jean-Marie Domenach who devoted a lot of attention to the Algerian problem in *Ésprit*. FLN and PCA texts have also been used because their views are essential to the debate. A number of historians and sociologists complete the picture. This variety of documents enables one to evaluate the PCF and the *oppositionnel* standpoints in the light of other analyses of the Algerian nation, and to situate them in the spectrum of opinions on the question.



*Demystification of Algerian 'History'*

Tracing back the 'formation process' of the Algerian nation, the *oppositionnels* strove to demystify false pre-conceived notions about the history of Algeria.

Colonial historiography constantly emphasised the existence of scattered tribes populating Algeria prior to the conquest. The subtitle of Robert Aron's first chapter on the origin of the war introduced pre-colonial Algeria as 'a dust of tribes'.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note that Léon Feix's version, 'the population divided into tribes', comes very close to Robert Aron's.<sup>63</sup> *Algérie, passé et présent*, written by Yves Lacoste, André Nouschi and André Prenant, quoted extensively in this section, was based on very thorough research and refuted these assertions which in effect permitted a 'justification' of the French occupation. Jean Dresch in an article in *Clarté* ridiculed the stereotypes ('*images d'Épinal*') taught in French schools concerning Algeria, which needed to be dispelled:

We French people are ourselves taught a falsified version of history by our regime, a version which pervades our minds . . . We are convinced that the Algerians are an inferior race . . . which has always been incapable of creating its very own civilisation and of organising a solid State. They are alleged to be talented in causing chaos, anarchy, division, in not being able to go beyond a clannish tribal mentality.<sup>64</sup>

The *oppositionnels* stress the existence of an Algerian state with fairly well defined boundaries and distinct from its neighbours Tunisia and Morocco, prior to the French conquest but they do not try to argue that Algeria existed as an accomplished nation before 1830, although they did publish (in 1958) an FLN statement putting forward such a view.<sup>65</sup> They normally argued that Algeria had, prior to 1830, achieved a relatively advanced degree of territorial, political and cultural unity.<sup>66</sup> This view, formulated by Lacoste-Nouschi-Prenant, can be considered here as expressing a view divergent from the official Party line, although their book was published under the auspices of the PCF. A personal interview with two of the authors confirmed that they were in disagreement with the Party position over Algeria. It appears that they were discouraged by the Party leading circles from publishing a second volume that was due to follow. According to the *oppositionnels*, colonisation

completed the process of formation of the nation, introducing capitalism and the economic unity which provided a basis for the consolidation of other elements such as language, culture and psychological make-up. The *oppositionnels* argue that colonisation speeded up the unification of Arab and Berber populations by opening up arteries of communication, shifting populations and building up a common hostility and resistance against oppression.

The Party's proposition that Algeria became a nation in 1957 was countered by different alternatives. Lacoste-Nouschi-Prenant saw the beginning of that process as dating from the defeat of Abd El Kader (mid-nineteenth century) who in their opinion 'destroyed the essential basis of feudalism in a land of Islam'.<sup>67</sup>

Serge Weinstock from *Tribune Marxiste* regarded the Algerian nation as having been completed by the First World War.<sup>68</sup> *Voies Nouvelles* on the other hand saw the Second World War as a hypothetical date for the completion of the Algerian nation.<sup>69</sup>

#### *Arab-Berber population and colonialism*

Whilst the *oppositionnels* expressed varying views on the precise dating of the Algerian nation, they were unanimous over the question of the settlers. On this issue they were totally opposed to the Party's theory.

Jean Baby in *Critique de Base* virulently opposed the thesis which encompassed the settlers into the Algerian nation: 'It is fundamentally wrong to consider that the settlers are part of the Algerian nation in the same way as the colonised people. The Algerian nation is essentially composed of all the elements . . . which suffer from colonial exploitation in varied ways.'<sup>70</sup>

This quotation by Jean Baby is worth pondering over. Indeed the two groups, Arab-Berbers and settlers, stood at two opposite ends of a spectrum, the first one regarding France as an invader and oppressor, the latter identifying with France. The colonised population, i.e. the Arab-Berbers, had good reasons for considering their interests as directly antagonistic to French rule. Their character, the fruit of a long common history, was enhanced by the traumatic experience of colonialism, which decimated the indigenous population and plundered their land. From 1830 onwards, it was a history of oppression

and exploitation at the hands of French imperialism assisted by the settlers. This analysis was a standard point of departure for the *oppositionnels*. The immense deprivation of the Arab-Berber populations and the atrocities they suffered need not be recounted in detail; historians such as Mostefa Lacheraf,<sup>71</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron<sup>72</sup> and many others have brought the matter sufficiently to light already.

However, France's pillage of Algeria and the real situation of the Arab-Berbers was less well-known at the time of the war. Nouschi-Lacoste-Prenant and *Voies Nouvelles* found it necessary to dispel any illusions the French people may have had about France's 'civilising mission' in Algeria, and exposed these matters to allow a better understanding of the conflict in Algeria.

The *oppositionnels* showed that the history of French colonisation in Algeria had not contributed to bridging the gap between the settlers and the Arab-Berber population as the PCF had claimed. Quite to the contrary, it strengthened the Arab-Berber separate identity. The Arab-Berbers did not suffer from cultural 'virginity' but possessed an indigenous culture which proved far more resilient than expected. Their very struggle to maintain it against the process of acculturation attempted by France reinforced their national identity.

Emphasising the high level of Arab-Berber culture, Lacoste-Nouschi-Prenant were able to show an advanced stage of literacy in Algeria before the French conquest. This was noticeable to historians who were not intent on portraying the 'uncivilised' character of the natives in order to serve colonialist propaganda:

Between these human groupings often having contradictory interests, a link was being established through the Muslim culture which in a variety of forms was that of 99 per cent of the population. It was not merely a religious community but was also one which incorporated a system of education, legal structures and social relations.<sup>73</sup>

In 1830 Algerian literacy was better than that in France. Having closed down the local koranic school the French administration created an insufficient number of French schools to replace them. The result was disastrous and can plainly be defined as a decivilising operation. In addition to the scanty

numbers of French schools, their influence was limited by the reluctance of the native population to accept the 'indoctrination' of its children by colonialist institutions.<sup>74</sup> Linguistic and religious reasons also accounted for the rather hostile attitude of the Arab-Berber population to French schools. In a concerted effort to reduce the population to total submission, French colonisation made a deliberate attempt to obliterate any trace of indigenous culture. The closure of koranic schools corresponded to other measures intending to control the Islamic religion and to eradicate the Arabic language. The French state took over the Muslim religion, instituting an Islamic clergy, appointed by the administration.<sup>75</sup> A number of mosques were closed down and some of them turned into cathedrals. French had been imposed as the official language to the detriment of any other. It had become virtually illegal to teach Arabic and this provided a pretext for the closure of koranic schools.<sup>76</sup> Even as late as 1954, after the teaching of Arabic had been officially recognised and accepted by the French government, it could never be implemented because of the obstacles raised by education officers.<sup>77</sup>

Jean Dresch, in *Le fait national algérien*, stressed the significance of both Islam and Arabic as 'indices' of the Arab-Berber national identity. Islam which united Arabs and Berbers also implied a specific way of life and governed customs and culture. The Arabic language had spread with the Muslim religion so that both were intimately related.<sup>78</sup> These two elements could not but widen the gap between the Arab-Berbers and the settlers, all the more so as the Arab-Berbers remained obstinately faithful to their religion and their language: 'The Muslim masses in Algeria are conscious of the fact that the language of their culture, their mother tongue, their national language is Arabic.'<sup>79</sup>

The resistance of Arab-Berbers to 'gallicisation' was evidenced by the poor results reaped by 'naturalisation' measures. There were only 2500 naturalisations from 1865 to 1934, that is around 26 per year. It was a total failure.<sup>80</sup> In addition to a variety of restrictions set up by the administration for the sake of a careful selection, naturalisation failed to attract Arab-Berbers despite its advantages (not to be treated under the *code de l'indigénat*) because it demanded that naturalised Arab-Berbers renounce their 'personal status'. Muslims were

governed by a specific set of laws derived from the Koran, which differed from Roman law; this became known as their 'personal status'. This, the Arab-Berber population was not prepared to abandon.<sup>81</sup>

As we can see, the historical experience of the colonised Algerian people therefore was not limited to passive subjection but also expressed itself in various forms of resistance: from armed rebellions with Abd El Kader and Al Mokrani to organised purchases of land in order to win it back from the settlers.<sup>82</sup> The Arab-Berbers preserved a religion and a language which was not that of the French. All those actions blossomed into an Algerian culture enriched with poems, songs and literature:

Get naturalised! They tell us  
Now they say: forget the past!  
They tell us: religion is of no use.  
Should we forget our traditions  
into Frenchmen we will be painted.  
We shall reject the yoke of France  
... The land of our fathers we shall protect.<sup>83</sup>

This culture could not bring the Arab-Berber closer to the settlers, who themselves could not possibly share it because it stemmed from a very specific experience and history enriched by the resistance to colonial oppression.

#### *The colonisers, the colonised and colonialism*

It is difficult to imagine that the settlers' collective memory could build on similar experiences and operate a rapprochement with the Arab-Berber psychological make-up. In opposition to the PCF's interpretation of the Algerian situation, claiming that the majority of settlers had 'nothing to do' with colonialism,<sup>84</sup> the *oppositionnels* argued that they saw their interests at one with the existence and continuation of a French imperialist presence in Algeria. *Tribune Marxiste* explained that the presence of settlers in Algeria took its roots in the plundering of Arab lands and continued to rest on vast privileges ensured by French colonial rule.<sup>85</sup> Consequently the settlers would fear a move towards a liberalisation of the system or the armed rebellion of the Arab-Berbers which would put their privileges at risk.<sup>86</sup> As a result the settlers were to constitute a force actually opposing any breaking down of the watertight

partition between the Arab-Berber community and their own. The stronger the Arab-Berber national liberation movement, the stronger the centrifugal force driving Arab-Berbers and settlers apart as the latter would feel more threatened.

It is no wonder that Jacques Arnault found it difficult to account for the settlers' lack of enthusiasm *vis-à-vis* the Algerian national liberation movement. He put it down to a 'belated Algerian national consciousness' resulting from a situation 'warped by colonialism' with which the settlers 'identified'.<sup>87</sup> The *oppositionnels*' analysis is far more convincing, as they point out the absence of an objective basis for any national consciousness shared in common between Arab-Berbers and settlers, excluding the settlers from the Algerian nation.

Obstacles to the merging of the settlers and the Arab-Berbers were multiplied by the colonial situation to the point at which the two societies in fact lived alongside each other without ever making contact. While the Party overlooked this fact, the *oppositionnels* did not fail to underline it.<sup>88</sup> Henri Raymond, in *Voies Nouvelles*, gave a concise description of what he calls the 'colonial phenomenon'. 'Two very unequal fractions of population (from one to nine), an economic, linguistic, cultural dividing line, this is what one can call "the colonial phenomenon"'.<sup>89</sup>

A specific relationship took shape governing the settler/colonised parameter, which was the direct reflection of their objective situation. *Voies Nouvelles* concerned itself with this relationship, analysing it with the kind of sensitivity that can be found in Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* or in Frantz Fanon's works. In Henri Raymond's words:

The colonised man does little because he is lazy; the proof is that he does not work. He eats very little and he has no clothes because his needs are few; the proof of it is that he continues to live in conditions which would be intolerable to Europeans. He rises against his masters because he is ungrateful and instigated by outsiders; the proof is that for a hundred years he had remained placid.<sup>90</sup>

Henri Raymond's article on the stereotype imposed on the 'colonised' by the settler fulfilled a very useful function at a time when those who understood this point were extremely rare, even among the left and within the ranks of the PCF:

idle out of laziness, incompetent, an innate criminal, sly, barbarian and congenitally minor, all notions that justify the superiority and the rule of the settlers. It is interesting to compare Henri Raymond's article to Albert Memmi's<sup>91</sup> on the portrait drawn by the settlers of the Arab-Berbers. The complex instilled in the 'colonised'<sup>92</sup> may lead him to 'accept the white man's value'. Colonialism having persuaded the colonised individual that his culture is inferior posits the French culture as the one worthy of being pursued. The 'colonised' may strive to become identical to the coloniser; this is to no avail. Even time and history have been unable to achieve this result: 'assimilation' was made impossible by the colonial situation and by the refusal of the coloniser.<sup>93</sup> More concretely, this was illustrated many times by the settlers' stubborn refusal of any improvement in the Arab-Berbers' conditions, which would have raised them closer to the settlers' level. Even if one individual could achieve success, collective success on the part of the indigenous population was incompatible with the colonial relationship based on the inequality between the two groups: 'It has been sufficiently demonstrated that the colonial condition can only be changed by the elimination of the colonial relation.'<sup>94</sup>

If any real trend had been observed which pointed to the bridging of the gap between the two communities, patience and time might possibly have accomplished the merging process. But, on the contrary, the two groups drew further apart, in spite of the Party's wild optimism.<sup>95</sup>

J. J. Mayoux draws attention to the violent rejection of the colonisers' culture brought about by the century old oppression and cultural alienation suffered by Arabs and Berbers.<sup>96</sup> The validity of Mayoux's observation has been amply demonstrated in Frantz Fanon's works.<sup>97</sup> A violent denial of all aspects of French oppression became necessary as an ideological weapon in the struggle against French colonialism. In the eyes of the Arab-Berbers, the French settlers were at once the symbols and the instruments of colonialism. The fruitful exchange between 'Occidental and Oriental culture', advocated by the PCF,<sup>98</sup> stood no chance at all under the circumstances of colonialism which imposed the 'oppression' of a society.<sup>99</sup>

*The PCF under criticism*

*The oppositionnels.* Despite all those counter-indications, Léon Feix in 1955 attempted to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Algerian nation in an effort to prove the merger between the two communities into one nation:

Today Algeria is a community which can be considered stable, as it is historically built on the basis of common territory and a common economic life albeit one which has been distorted by the colonial regime. In daily life as in the struggle against this regime for an Algeria freed from its chains, the links which exist between the various ethnic elements are being strengthened. At the same time, on a cultural level, an Algerian national character has developed and manifested itself, over a few years, by the blooming of an Algerian mystique, painting, literature . . . The problem of language can be resolved [later].<sup>100</sup>

Léon Feix's definition follows Stalin's classic text on the nation, enumerating each of the nation's components one by one, except for the language. Serge Weinstock did not fail to notice the absence of a common national language in Feix's definition: 'What about the national language without which there is neither nation nor national culture? L. Feix has simply evaded the question.'<sup>101</sup>

Even assuming that the national language was undergoing a transformation, what was it to be? A new language, a mixture of French and Arabic? It was unlikely that the settlers would adopt it and at any rate languages have proved to take more than a few dozen years to be born. In circumstances where France and the French settlers controlled the seat of power, one could not conceive of Algerian Arabic becoming the national language, since France, having the upper hand, would have continued to impose its language. In that case French would have become the Algerian national language; but could this solution be accepted by a communist party which claimed to oppose 'assimilation based on coercion'? It was inconceivable that French would be adopted as a national language by millions of Arab-Berbers who mastered their own medium of communication, and considered the French language as that of the oppressors, alien to them. B. Merghoub quoted the popular adage: 'French is the language of bread, Arabic that of



speech',<sup>102</sup> indicating that French was only used by Arab-Berbers if they needed it in their employment, but not as a real tool of communication.

It is very clear that, for a very long time, the PCF did not wish to contemplate the 'Arab' character of Algeria, being primarily concerned with the contribution of a French character via the settlers. This approach definitely oriented Algeria towards a *rapprochement* with France rather than other Arab countries.

The PCF was unfavourable to the establishment of a relationship between Algeria and its North African neighbours, Tunisia and Morocco, which would divert their attention from political and economic links with France. The Party found an argument in the somewhat 'French' character of the Algerian nation bestowed upon it by the settlers to promote close links between Algeria and France. *Oppositionnels* such as Jean G r me and the Sorbonne Lettres cell, on the contrary, stressed the 'Arab vocation' of Algeria and the need for Algeria to establish links with Tunisia, Morocco and other Arab countries rather than with France.<sup>103</sup>

*The FLN.* The Party's theory of the 'nation in formation' designed to include French settlers was directly rejected by the FLN itself. In an article addressing itself to the PCF, the FLN refuted Maurice Thorez's theory and pointed to its inherent contradictions:

It is thus that M. Thorez, who for years had maintained that without a merger between Europeans and Algerians there could be no constituted Algerian nation, declared, on 15 February 1957, the merger complete and the Algerian nation constituted whereas the majority of Europeans had closed ranks around the colonialists.<sup>104</sup>

This statement is a direct contradiction of the earlier PCF assertions that a good number of Europeans were supporting the Algerian national liberation struggle. History has demonstrated after the 13 May 1958 and subsequent events, including the settlers' massive flight to France at the end of the war, that the FLN's interpretation was the most accurate one. Alternatively, the FLN laid stress on the existence of an Algerian state, internationally recognised prior to 1830, and on the fact

that the territorial, historical, linguistic and cultural unity could not be destroyed by colonialism. This was stated by *El Moujahid*, acknowledging the existence of a European minority but 'in no way assimilated to the Algerian nation'.<sup>105</sup> The impossibility of a *rapprochement* between the settlers and Arab-Berber populations under the conditions of colonialism had already been emphasised by the *oppositionnels*. It is interesting to note that this line of thought was also an important element of the FLN position. An additional document clarified the FLN's position on the Algerian nation. To those who did not cease to reproach the FLN with its reference to an Algerian nation existing before Bugeaud's arrival, *El Moujahid* explained the ideological significance of such a statement:

The 'nation in formation', the 'new Algeria', the 'unique case in history', all these recondite phrases have been swept away by the FLN position and, in the bright light of the sun, only subsisted the heroic struggle of a whole people against age-old oppression.<sup>106</sup>

According to the FLN, the theory of the 'nation in formation' was an ideological instrument against the armed struggle, or used as such, and therefore deserved to be rejected outright.

*The PCA.* Another major and similar criticism against the nation in formation was to be voiced by the PCA in 1958. Until the mid-fifties, the PCA had generally followed the same line as that of its elder 'brother-party', the PCF. The pressure of events engineered by the 1954 insurrection led the PCA to radicalise its position. A first decision to participate in the liberation struggle with the FLN (taken in June 1956) culminated in a PCA-FLN agreement in the middle of 1956.<sup>107</sup> Members of the PCA even took part in activities which were condemned as 'terrorist' by the PCF.<sup>108</sup> In the meantime the PCF was voting for the Special Powers, which eventually led to the escalation of the war. The PCA had embraced the demand for Algerian independence since March 1956<sup>109</sup> whilst the PCF delayed it until the beginning of 1957. The PCA recognised the GPRA as soon as it was founded, whereas the PCF waited nearly three years.

The main bone of contention between the two parties concerned the analysis of the Algerian nation. When the PCA

produced its 'Essai sur la nation algérienne' the PCF at first refused to publish it.<sup>110</sup> The PCA did not directly attack the PCF theories; instead it made a self-criticism. Despite their disagreements there was never an open rupture between the two parties, which both maintained their allegiance to the CPSU. In its 'Essai sur la nation algérienne', the PCA traced the formation process of the Algerian nation in a brief survey of the Algerian national movement, showing how all the premises necessary to the formation of the nation had been accumulated:

It is a stable, historically constituted community with a language (Arabic), a territory, an economic life (the formation of which was accelerated by capitalist economic relations introduced by the colonial system). It has a psychological make-up of which the most undisputable aspect is its aspiration towards independence. All these features have found expression in a cultural community (of Arab-Islamic character open to the contributions of Western and in particular French culture).<sup>111</sup>

This definition stood as a parallel to Léon Feix (1955)<sup>112</sup> and in clear opposition to it.

The national consciousness of Algerians was said to have come to maturity with the Second World War. This notion can be compared to the one expressed by the cell Sorbonne Lettres in *Voies Nouvelles*.<sup>113</sup> As regards the nature of the Algerian nation, the verdict of the PCA did not leave a shadow of doubt about the settlers: 'The nation is formed with autochthonous Algerians. It does not comprise Europeans from Algeria.'<sup>114</sup>

This was a definite refutation of the PCF theory of the 'Algerian nation in formation' including the settlers. However, the PCA did not directly attack the PCF on this question. It blamed itself for having applied Maurice Thorez's theory dogmatically. The PCA claimed that it was its own former erroneous interpretation of Maurice Thorez's concept of '*nation en formation*' which had implied that the process of formation could not be completed before the merger of all its components, including the settlers.<sup>115</sup> The PCA reached a conclusion which had been expressed by other protagonists concerning the possible integration of a good number of Algerian settlers into the Algerian nation: it could only happen after independence.

Colonialism itself prevented such a merger.<sup>116</sup> This notion was also expressed by the *oppositionnels* and the FLN, but was to be voiced only much later by the PCF.

The PCA blamed itself for attaching an exaggerated importance to the 'nation in formation' concept which hampered a firm struggle against the pressure of colonialist ideology bred by the settlers. Rejecting its old affirmation that Algeria was 'neither French nor Arab' based on Maurice Thorez's mixture of 20 races, the PCA restored, in its theory, the 'Arab' nature of the Algerian nation.<sup>117</sup>

The condemnation of the PCF's theoretical pronouncements on Algeria was transparent through the PCA self-criticism. In a later document, the PCA did not refrain from formulating a sharp direct criticism of the PCF policy. Accepting that Thorez's theory of the nation in formation could have played a relatively positive role in 1939, it exposed itself as pernicious for the Algerian national liberation movement as early as 1942-3. 'One can say that to an extent it led to facilitate the continuation of imperialist domination.'<sup>118</sup>

This accusation is all the more telling in that it comes from a 'brother' party; the *oppositionnels* had voiced it as early as 1957:

The theory of the Algerian nation in formation served to conceal the fundamentally colonial character of the relationship between France and Algeria. It masked the revolutionary significance of the national struggle of colonised Algerians against French imperialism, it broke the solidarity of the working class in France with the nationalist movements in Algeria.<sup>119</sup>

The criticism here bears not only on the erroneous nature of PCF theory but also on its objective role once applied to the Algerian war situation: in practice an 'anti-revolutionary line'.

The publication of this document by the PCA at the beginning of 1960 seems to confirm my view that the PCF did not modify its interpretation of the Algerian nation after the PCA's self-criticism. By 1961, changes can be noticed in Jean Bruhat's article *Nation algérienne et opinion française*. Referring to Maurice Thorez's speech in 1939, Bruhat leaves out the customary reminder about 'the nation in formation' including the settlers, but recalls 'the national vocation of Algeria',<sup>120</sup> supposedly stressed by Thorez. As regards the integration of the settlers

into the Algerian nation, Bruhat expresses no firm opinion. 'Will this merger take place? . . . Nobody can tell today.'<sup>121</sup>

Eventually Bruhat specifies that only the severing of colonial links can enable the 'colonial minority' (i.e. settlers) to shed its racial prejudices against the 'natives', so that they might be able to merge into the Algerian nation which Bruhat earlier defined as an Arab nation.

The Party had partially been made to align itself with its critics, but never refuted its theory of the 'Algerian nation in formation'.

A number of writings by Party members (*oppositionnels*), whose views differed from the official PCF line on Algeria, elaborated an alternative analysis of the Algerian nation. Two main features counterposed this analysis to the Party definition:

1. The Algerian nation had become a 'constituted nation' at the latest by the end of the Second World War (and not in 1957 as the PCF claimed).
2. The Algerian nation was Arab in character and did not include the settlers: moreover, any *rapprochement* between settlers and Arab-Berbers was deemed impossible under the conditions of colonialism.

Both the FLN and the PCA confirmed these views and joined their voice to the concert of criticism against Maurice Thorez's concept of the Algerian nation in formation including the settlers.

The Party's analysis was not only considered by its opponents as theoretically erroneous, but it was also seen as an objective disapproval of the Algerian liberation movement fighting for Algerian independence.

The uncompleted state of the Algerian 'nation in formation' could have been taken to imply that Algeria was not ready for independence and therefore could be used as an ideological weapon against the Algerian national liberation struggle. The PCF denied any connection between its support for Algerian independence and its recognition of a 'constituted Algerian nation', but it is a strange coincidence that the Party declared the formation process of the Algerian nation completed precisely at the same time as it raised the slogan of Algerian independence – at the beginning of 1957.

It is possible to establish a correlation between the PCF's definition of the Algerian nation and its position on Algerian independence. The PCF upheld the demand for Algerian independence at the same time as it declared that Algeria had become a 'constituted nation', in 1957. The *oppositionnels* and the FLN stated that the PCF's theory of Algeria as a 'nation in formation' objectively militated against the struggle for independence. One could even take this proposition further and posit that it was precisely the rationale behind the PCF's line: the Party advanced the non-completion of the Algerian nation in a deliberate attempt to justify its postponement of Algerian independence, at a time when it did not judge it to be an appropriate slogan.

In the light of this study and of the *oppositionnels'* remarks, it is made clear that the PCF did not welcome the idea of Algerian independence for nearly two decades, for a variety of reasons. In 1936 it feared that Algeria might fall into the fascist camp. At the end of the Second World War it hoped that a French people's democracy could bring socialism to France and Algeria, and after 1947 it preferred French control over Algeria to what it saw as a potential US rule in Algeria.

The Party's analysis of the Algerian nation, designed to include the settlers, supported its policy against Algerian independence because it pointed to a continued relationship between Algeria and France. For the Party, the French settlers on the Algerian soil had woven historic ties between the two countries; as an integral part of the Algerian nation (following Maurice Thorez's definition), they reinforced the possibility and the necessity of preserving links between France and Algeria. The PCF, as a result, twisted its analysis in order to integrate the settlers into the Algerian nation, in the face of its observations of reality. At the same time the Party shared with the French people a sincere concern for the welfare of the settlers and insisted that they be taken into account.

Throughout that period the PCF's policy was carefully studied not to alienate the French people, who might not have welcomed the independence of Algeria.

However, the reasons underlying the Party lines on Algerian independence and on the Algerian nation lie in its attitude towards the French nation. Even as late as 1957 Marcel Dufri-

che formulated Algerian independence in terms of French interests 'with France or against France'.<sup>122</sup>

The Party remained convinced of France's revolutionary heritage and of its own duty towards the interests of the French nation. It was suspicious of the FLN Islamic and non-communist tendencies. In its procrastination and in its hesitation to support the Algerian struggle, the PCF revealed once more its confusion over the nature of the conflict, in practice refusing to acknowledge that it was a national liberation struggle against French imperialism.

The *oppositionnels* criticised the Party on all these points. Their first concern was the support of the Algerian liberation struggle, regardless of the degree of maturity of the Algerian nation. Their support was motivated by the FLN's standpoint 'against imperialism', and they adopted an unequivocal position in favour of independence. As regards the character of Algeria, the conclusions of the *oppositionnels* on the Algerian nation 'with an Arab vocation' seemed to derive from a more scientific approach than that of the Party and certainly more accurately reflected reality. As a final remark, a party member writing to *Vérité Pour* questioned the Party's prerogative of defining the Algerian nation arguing, in Lenin's words, that 'it is the right of nations to define themselves'.<sup>123</sup>

A nation cannot be examined as a static phenomenon. The notion of 'nation in formation' could have been an interesting concept and a useful tool for the study of Algerian evolution if such a study had scientifically examined the cumulation of 'indices' contributing to the formation of the Algerian nation through history. Unfortunately, the PCF's method was not based on a sound historical approach. Contrasting Jean Dresch's article with other customary PCF documents, René Gallissot pointed out the diverging approaches: 'Jean Dresch's approach proceeds from the rejection of ideological and political a priori to replace it by a completely historical analysis'.<sup>124</sup>

The PCF failed to notice or to accept that the national consolidation of Algeria was driving it further away from France.

## 6 France's Military Involvement in Algeria: The PCF and the *Oppositionnels*

In the context of the Algerian war a multitude of problems arose requiring concrete solutions. France had thrown herself into a war directly affecting major aspects of her political and economic life. The extent of France's commitment to the war might not have been seen clearly as early as 1954 but the participation of the conscripts, i.e. every 18-year-old ready for his national service, did not allow the perpetuation of ignorance among the French people. The issue of conscription necessitated a definite standpoint from the communist party. Eventually many of the pressing questions relating to the Algerian war were to become polarised around aspects of the military intervention.

### THE PCF AND THE ARMY

The PCF did not elaborate a response in isolation from its theoretical appreciation of the role of the army in French society and it is therefore necessary to give a brief summary of the Party's approach to the army. It is possible to outline a number of recurrent features in the main Party documents on the army from the Second World War up to the Algerian war. The peculiarity of the situation is that France combines both a strong professional army and a conscript army; the Party generally reserved a different treatment for each. In addition, one needs constantly to bear in mind the Party's analysis of the French nation, since this underlies the interdependence of the two aspects: professional and conscript army.



## **The Professional Army**

In the first place, at a very general ideological level, the professional army is assessed by the Party as 'a weapon of oppression'. It is seen to be solely 'an instrument of domination' at the service of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> According to the PCF, the bourgeoisie itself had lost its national character, detaching itself from the nation as early as 1871. The PCF believed that the army had followed the same path and equally lost all its characteristics of 'national defence'. The Party quoted Pétain as the best representative of an army of 'national betrayal'. Raymond Guyot described the rule governing this phenomenon: 'When the bourgeoisie betrays the nation the army is placed at the service of this betrayal.'<sup>2</sup>

The concept of the professional army as an army of 'national betrayal' had been formulated by the PCF. In 1946 Alfred Malleret, a communist deputy, in his speech to the National Assembly called the professional army an 'army of defeat'.<sup>3</sup> Raymond Guyot had made it clear that, in his view, it was the same bourgeoisie, the same 'two hundred families' who, from Versailles to Munich and Vichy had 'betrayed' the French nation and 'surrendered' both the French people and its army for the benefit of their selfish class interests.<sup>4</sup> In the Party's eyes, France's participation in NATO, under the control of the United States, was a repetition of the same scenario: the bourgeoisie had allowed French national integrity and independence to be violated once again. The loss of the army's national character had even been institutionalised, added the Party, in so far as the Atlantic Pact incorporated sections of the French army, subordinated to US or German supervision.<sup>5</sup> Raymond Guyot, expressing the view that no national defence can exist without national independence, noted the general 'mortgaging' of France to foreign powers since the expulsion of communists from the government in May 1947. Guyot's words, in 1951, could be assumed as simply strengthening a campaign against the cold war. Yet the same theme was still being reiterated in 1958, that of an army 'subordinated under American or even German orders to be used against an openly identifiable enemy, the Soviet Union and the French people'.<sup>6</sup>

For the Party, the national 'betrayal' of the professional army was compounded with and evidenced by its attitude

towards the French people. The Party's identification between the national interest and the people's interest (studied in Chapter 4) confirmed the professional army's 'betrayal' of the nation, since it was used against the French people. The mission of the professional army was described as the protection of the bourgeoisie's interests against its 'internal enemy', i.e. the working class and all those who opposed capitalist exploitation and foreign rule.<sup>7</sup>

Guyot recalled as an example the violent interventions of the army against the striking miners in 1947, and its role as a strike-breaker against the transport workers. In this the PCF follows the traditional line of the French left ever since the nineteenth century. According to Claude Chevallier, the declarations of the President de Conseil, stressing the importance of the '*défense en surface de la métropole*', 'internal security' and 'counter-revolutionary psychological warfare', contributed to the propagation of fascist ideology.<sup>8</sup> 'Fascist' trends in the army were exacerbated by the war in Algeria; the need to purge what the PCF called fascist officers was reiterated by Claude Chevallier. A favourite theme in the immediate post-Second World War period, it assumed a renewed urgency with the rising influence of Massu, Salan and Zeller.

On the other hand, further readings reveal a rather 'optimistic' outlook on the part of the PCF, concerning the very same professional army. Whether dealing with the question of national independence or a possible 'fascist threat', the Party claimed that the bulk of the professional army showed 'healthy reactions'. The 12th Congress of the PCF stated that 'French officers felt humiliated to be placed under foreign command'.<sup>9</sup>

In reality there is no hard evidence that a substantial number of officers did protest against their subordination to 'foreign command' and the Party failed to quote any such actions.

During the Algerian war, the Party refused to cast blame on the professional army as a whole for the terrible torture perpetrated *en masse* against the Algerian people. Its condemnation fell solely on a 'few regiments of parachutists and legionaries'.<sup>10</sup>

These assertions could be considered as whitewashing the rest of the army, which was involved as a whole in various atrocities: this was demonstrated and exposed by anti-torture committees and publications during the Algerian war. (The

Comité Audin and the author of *La Gangrène*<sup>11</sup> devoted their efforts to this task.) Jacques Debouzy, who contributed to *oppositionnel* reviews at this time, stressed the importance of dispelling the illusions and the confusion spread by the Party about the French army.<sup>12</sup> And André Marty, after his expulsion, revealed that an excessive faith in the French army existed in the PCF at the time of the Indo-China war. In his opinion, the Party, which attributed all the most horrible crimes to ex-Nazis or other motley criminals, was exposed as 'chauvinist', because it would not accept that French soldiers were capable of atrocities.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the Party concentrated on the foreign legion and the parachutists as its main target, identifying contradictions of a varied nature amongst the ranks of the army. Quoting the example of Général de la Bollardière, who resigned in protest against the use of torture in Algeria, the Party reached conclusions too positive to be true as unfortunately the example of Général de la Bollardière was all the more celebrated as it was exceptional. Most officers allowed torture to continue, unhampered. And yet the PCF felt confident in stating that the great bulk of the army, the conscripts, the majority of officers and sub-officers and even some generals, were indignant at these 'fascist methods'.<sup>14</sup>

The Party established a dividing line within the army, identifying and classifying soldiers on the basis of their attitude to the Republic, 'on the one hand the supporters of militarism and reaction, on the other hand an essential group composed of republican soldiers, sub-officers, superior officers and generals'.<sup>15</sup>

After the 1958 alarm and attempted putsch, the same 'optimistic' interpretation persisted: 'Sedition was only the work of a fraction of the army'.<sup>16</sup>

In searching for an explanation of the Party's attitude, one could formulate several hypotheses. The PCF which was often branded as the '*parti de l'étranger*' (the party of the outsider) might have hesitated in criticising the French army more vehemently lest it be accused of anti-French propaganda. Alternatively it might have stressed 'traditional' values such as chivalry in an effort to mobilise French professional soldiers, officers in particular, against the more 'modern' methods such as torture. A third possibility appears to be consistent with the

Party's general tactics against fascism: an appeal to republican ideals in the army against the threat of an extreme right-wing military takeover. The latter reason appears to be the essential one. It was not, however, only a tactical proposal. The Party's approach to the Republic, its own patriotism and its interpretation of the French nation tie in with its analysis of the army and must be taken into consideration. This is done in the following section on the *contingent*.

### **The Contingent\***

The Party's approach to the *contingent* was very different. The conscript army corresponded to the PCF's idea of a 'national army'. Against the notion of the professional army, the Party constantly counterposed the 'nation in arms', 'this national army of the Great Revolution'.<sup>17</sup> Either quoting texts from the Resistance, or Jean Jaurès's '*armée nouvelle*', or even more often the French Revolution, the Party developed the concept of a national army at the service of the nation. This army of a new type was promoted in the wake of the Second World War at a time when the army included a number of communist officers; the Party then strove for the purging of fascist sympathisers and the promotion of 'true republicans'. Later again, Guyot in 1951 set off against the traitors of Koblenz, the Versaillese and Gaullist officers,<sup>18</sup> which he deemed incapable of fulfilling the army's task of national defence, safeguarding national independence against foreign encroachments. To the bourgeoisie's efforts 'in fact to isolate the Army from the Nation and turn it into an instrument of civil war and external aggression'<sup>19</sup> the PCF opposed an army 'close to the people, united with it [the people] in the same republican ideal'.<sup>20</sup>

The PCF constantly stressed the republican nature of the ideal national army.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship posited by the Party between nation, people and republic, which gave the army its character, requires analysis. As we have already seen, nation and people tend to be identical in the eyes of the PCF; hence it is understandable that a national army cannot but be linked to the people. As the bourgeoisie had 'betrayed' the nation and detached itself from it, it also followed that the 'national' army (or conscript army) would defend the interests of the people against bour-

geois interests. The Republic, emanating from the nation through its chosen representatives, therefore had to be upheld, and the national army had to fulfil this role of defending the Republic, since military power was regarded as subordinated to civilian power. The Party here failed to specify which republic it was speaking of, the actual French Republic which was a bourgeois republic, or the ideal 'social republic'.

The total identification between nation and people fostered the illusion that the French Republic was not a bourgeois institution but was truly representative of the people. This illusion also applied to the army, which suddenly lost its class character, that of defending the interests of the ruling class, i.e. the bourgeoisie.

The grey areas in the PCF's analysis of the army, which is sometimes self-contradictory, can be clarified if we approach the problem from another angle: the Party's concern with internal and external 'fascist machinations' which was a recurrent theme in its propaganda. At the time of the campaign against German rearmament, the need to promote France's independence against a strong Germany in Europe was always accompanied by references to Nazism. As the successive coup attempts in Algiers revealed a definite menace, the Party intensified its campaign against De Gaulle, against the 'Généraux Factieux' and against the OAS, assimilating them all under the label of 'fascism'. The republic needed to be preserved against such threats. In Marxist terms, the French Republic nonetheless remained bourgeois, the form of government assumed by bourgeois democracy, i.e. democracy for the bourgeoisie. The PCF nevertheless judged that it was advantageous for the working masses to live under bourgeois democracy rather than under fascism, the ravages of which they had experienced during the Nazi occupation of France.

The Party's dual approach to the army may thus be clarified. On the one hand, both conscripts and professionals, were good 'republicans', opposed to fascism. On another plane, the Party's analysis of the army derived from the class contradictions in France: the professional army was considered as the arm of the bourgeoisie, the 'armed band of capital'.

Both propositions were not necessarily contradictory, since the republic could be both bourgeois and anti-fascist. However, the PCF never made these points clearly. On the whole, the

Party concentrated on the first aspect, so that short-term political considerations enabled it to gloss over a more basic analysis of French society and of the republic. The Party's long developments on the 'nation in arms', its unqualified praises for the republic and its identification between all three concepts of nation/people/republic, lead one to conclude that the PCF had a view closer to that of the traditional French left in the nineteenth century; in other words, of the view of the people and the republic outlined by Jean Jaurès in *l'Armée Nouvelle*. This attitude of support for Parliament, the Constitution and the law of the republic ('the republic has no enemies on the left') was reinforced by the Party's new strategy for seizing power:

The parliamentary road emerges as a particular example of the peaceful road to socialism. At present the possibility of transforming Parliament from an instrument of bourgeois domination into one of socialist change within the country is to be accepted on the condition that a powerful popular movement led by the working class and its party is associated with the parliamentary struggle.<sup>22</sup>

Maurice Thorez in his political report introduced Parliament as an instrument for the building of socialism. It would therefore be all the more important for the Party to pledge its full support for Parliament. And the preservation of the republic assumed a fresh significance in the eyes of the PCF, which seemed to hope for a peaceful transformation of the bourgeois republic into the 'social republic'.

## THE SPECIAL POWERS

One instance of the PCF's action in Parliament concerning the Algerian war deserves special consideration: the 1956 Special Powers which irrevocably threw France into an all-out war for the preservation of its domination over Algeria. The year 1956 was an important one for the PCF: for the first time since 1947, it appeared that the PCF was in a position to come out of its isolation. The PCF pinned a lot of hopes on the victory of the 'left' in the January elections. On the trade-union front, 1955 witnessed a positive move towards a *rapprochement*. In the

spring of 1955, 27 agreements were concluded between the CGT, FO and the CFTC on the question of salaries.<sup>23</sup> During the same year the PCF launched a number of appeals for a United Front with the Socialist Party. On 30 November 1955 the Bureau Politique declared: 'It is possible to establish a programme of democratic and working class forces, a programme of the left based on national independence, peace, secularism, liberties and social progress, a programme acceptable to all democrats.'<sup>24</sup>

The Socialist Party did not actually respond positively, but nonetheless the PCF campaigned actively as the elections approached. Eleven million voters decided for 'left policies' and the PCF reasserted its readiness to come to an agreement with the Socialist Party.<sup>25</sup> The situation looked more optimistic as a whole for the PCF: the 20th Congress of the CPSU initiated the process of *détente* and developed the concept of the peaceful road to socialism, which the PCF took up at its 14th congress. This outlook enhanced the importance of the United Front even further. To an extent, Guy Mollet's visit to the Soviet Union was interpreted as an encouraging step by the Party and seemed to confirm its predictions for a change of governmental policies in France. A new Popular Front could be in the offing, it thought.

It is in this general context that the Socialist Party in government asked for the Special Powers in order to enjoy *carte blanche* in its dealings with the Algerian problem, to take 'any exceptional measures demanded by circumstances for the restoration of order, the protection of people and property and the safeguarding of territory'.<sup>26</sup>

The PCF voted in favour of the Special Powers, and thus became responsible, before history and its members, for the consequences of that vote. Initially, the explanation put forward for such a vote mobilised three main types of argument:

1. The PCF hoped that it could have a voice in the future policies of the Socialist government if it gave its vote to Guy Mollet, whereas a vote against the Special Powers from the PCF would make the government 'a hostage of reaction' (since Guy Mollet would have to rely on the right-wing to secure the stability of his government).
2. The Party assumed against all the odds that the Socialist

government might use the Special Powers to impose peace in Algeria.

3. A vote in favour of the Special Powers would create favourable conditions for unity between socialists and communists.<sup>27</sup>

The Party did not seem to detect any contradiction between the support for peace in Algeria and the United Front in France: it voted for the Special Powers as a means to further negotiation and peace. Did the Party genuinely believe that Guy Mollet was able and willing to make peace in Algeria? A number of factors would seem to support such a hypothesis, including the fact that the Socialist Party had pronounced itself for the recognition of an 'Algerian personality'<sup>28</sup> (without defining the term), and the real swing in public opinion revealed by the January elections towards left-wing policies, including peace in Algeria.

However, Guy Mollet himself made it absolutely clear at the time that he would not yield to communist pressure; it looks as though he was much more afraid of falling under the PCF's influence than of becoming the 'hostage of the right-wing' when he reassured the right-wing deputies that the government had 'no intention' of following 'the policies which these gentlemen [communists] would like him to do'.<sup>29</sup> And he also hinted at his designs with respect to Algeria – an escalation of the war: 'Currently we have a fifth of the army in Algeria. I am convinced that it is possible to do better and more.'<sup>30</sup>

Upon closer examination, the PCF itself did not seem overconfident that Guy Mollet was intent on concluding peace. This was made clear by Jacques Duclos in a meeting with Guy Mollet: 'Article 5 of the government project which tends to give the government wider powers to take any exceptional measures to restore order may lead to very serious events which, far from facilitating a resolution of the Algerian problem, would, on the contrary, contribute to aggravate it seriously.'<sup>31</sup>

It is more plausible to assume that peace in Algeria was not really the main target of the PCF in voting for the Special Powers, but that the Party was essentially striving to secure the right conditions for the United Front. It was emphasised in the 1956 Congress resolutions that a communist party must



consider the whole (the United Front) and that the perspective of a new Popular Front should not be sacrificed to a disagreement over a specific area of policy: Algeria. The PCF's reservations had been formulated by Jacques Duclos in a meeting with Guy Mollet prior to the vote.<sup>32</sup> For a better understanding of the PCF's historical dilemma in 1956, one must remember the terrible isolation and ghettoisation of the PCF during the cold war. In 1955–6, the PCF was psychologically and politically desperate for reintegration into French politics. It felt that the United Front with the Socialist Party was both possible and desirable and would be the instrument to accomplish everything else; without it the PCF thought that nothing else could be achieved. This general perspective can render the PCF's attitude understandable. The Party stated clearly that it was favourably impressed by the Socialist government for its 'social policies' (paid holidays, retirement pensions) and for its positive foreign policy towards the USSR.<sup>33</sup> The Party feared that a vote hostile to Guy Mollet might jeopardise its cherished concept of a United Front. The PCF did not want to sacrifice the 'whole', the United Front and the achievements of the Socialist government, for the 'part', Guy Mollet's policy on Algeria.<sup>34</sup>

The numerous official explanations and justifications for this vote disclose the existence of internal disagreements. The debate was already running high within the Party prior to the actual vote. Many cells held heated discussions over it and so disturbed were the militants that numerous cells had to be honoured by the visit of a federal delegate to explain the vote.<sup>35</sup> Léon Feix himself is alleged to have cried when he was told the final decision on the telephone.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to evaluate the span of protest inside the PCF in actual numbers over the Special Powers vote, but one feels confident in asserting that an important wave of protest shook the Party, before and after the vote, through individual cases quoted in the *oppositionnels'* newspapers and their comments.<sup>37</sup> This is corroborated by many persons interviewed who recall an extremely agitated period over the Special Powers vote. The cell of Saint-Cloud (Ecole Normale Supérieure) sent a telegram urging a negative vote.<sup>38</sup> In Plessis-Robinson a petition circulated by young communists collected six hundred signatures against the vote and a delegation was deputised to lobby the National Assembly,

comprising one socialist, one catholic and one communist delegate, against the Special Powers. In front of the Assembly, eight hundred persons demonstrated against the Special Powers.<sup>39</sup>

Criticisms varied in depth and severity. For some members of the Party, this vote involved a question of principle; no tactical necessity could justify it, argued Jean Tamarelle (cell Gabriel Péri à Marmande) in his letter to the Central Committee: 'It does not seem exaggerated to speak of a betrayal of proletarian internationalism, of stabbing our Algerian comrades in the back.'<sup>40</sup>

In practice, this vote entailed a qualitative change in France's military engagement in Algeria through committing the *contingent* to the war. The *oppositionnels* claimed that the PCF made itself the accomplice of the reaction and participated in a decision to crush the Algerian liberation struggle.

On the home front, the PCF's support for the Special Powers did not prove to be a very successful move; repression in France itself increased as a result. Anti-democratic measures were taken, restrictions on the liberty of the press were imposed and torture increased in Algeria while being introduced in France. As an immediate measure, prominent individuals such as Claude Bourdet and Henri Marrou were arrested or their domicile searched by the police; on 11 May 1956, *l'Humanité* was seized.<sup>41</sup> The PCF had made a rope to hang itself with, falling victim to its own vote, being hamstrung by the general anti-democratic measures that followed. The cell Sorbonne Lettres even established a direct causal link between the Special Powers and the 1958 events, indicting the Party for it.<sup>42</sup>

In a letter addressed to Jacques Duclos shortly after the vote on the Special Powers, François Marty, a member of the PCF, pointed out the contradiction between the Party's position of principle for a cease fire and its vote in favour of the Special Powers. His position was thereafter approved by the section committee (Velmanya Baillestavy in the Pyrénées Orientales) and by the Mayors and Municipal Councillors of Velmanya and Baillestavy, who were also members of the Party. This unanimity gives a good indication of the general strength of feeling against the vote. This vote led, according to Marty, to confusion, not only amongst communist members but also amongst the French masses, which trusted the Party's judge-

ment.<sup>43</sup> François Marty countered the main arguments deployed by the Party to account for its vote, and exposed their implications. They revealed the Party's 'parliamentarist' tendency, relying excessively on 'action' in the Assembly, making little of the masses' action which alone could prevent the Socialist Party from becoming a 'prisoner of the right-wing'. As for the 'unity of action' between socialists and communists that the Party vote was supposed to stimulate, it turned into 'unity of action with the government'. Eventually François Marty described the disarray among communist militants, who had to resort to misleading or incredible stories in order to defend the vote.<sup>44</sup>

Obligated to find a justification for the PCF's vote, communist members sometimes minimised the importance of the military measures taken by Guy Mollet; this, according to François Marty, was playing into the hands of the government. Others surmised secret plans of negotiations, arguing that the meeting with Nasser was a step in that direction; Marty believed that it only brought more grist to the bourgeois propaganda mill.

The dialogue between opponents of the Special Powers and a number of Party officials attempting to defend its position continued throughout the Algerian war. Léon Feix mentioned 'misunderstandings' on the 12 March vote in his answer to Sorbonne Lettres. 'Misunderstanding' is a euphemism in view of the reality of the situation, retaliated *la Voie Communiste*: 'It is in fact a condemnation of this disastrous vote by the vast majority of the Party.'<sup>45</sup>

Giving the PCF the benefit of the doubt, some *oppositionnels* acknowledged that compromises may have been necessary and were sometimes useful on condition that they be made to the advantage of the working class. In their opinion, the PCF had proved its 'opportunism' on 12 March 1956.<sup>46</sup> Who benefited from such a vote, asked *la Voie Communiste*, the bourgeoisie, or the proletariat?

In agreement with François Marty's conclusion, *la Voie Communiste* claimed that the Special Powers created or aggravated confusion among the French people over the question of Algeria and dampened down the struggle against the war. Instead of exposing unhesitatingly a very reactionary policy, the PCF is said to have given the green light to Guy Mollet. Hence the disillusionment that followed, paving the way for 1958. Accord-

ing to *la Voie Communiste*, the PCF's position on the Special Powers, which was ostensibly designed to secure unity between socialists and communists, paradoxically turned out to be detrimental to this very unity as it slowed down the joint action between communists and socialists against the war.<sup>47</sup>

The full significance of the PCF's vote on the Special Powers stands out more clearly in the light of subsequent events, and lends credence to the *oppositionnels'* criticisms.

The Party never admitted that it had made a mistake on 12 March 1956 or acknowledged the existence of a vast number of criticisms about the vote. However, it is reasonable to assume that the internal protest was widespread as it justified an official explanation from the Party. A key article appeared in *l'Humanité* in May under the innocuous heading of '*Réflexions sur un voyage en province*'. The place of the article on the first page and the rank of its author, Jeannette Vermeersch, revealed that it constituted an important statement emanating from the highest authorities in the Party. The answer she offered to the 'cell Escarbotin', whose members 'were asking explanations on the vote granting full powers to Guy Mollet',<sup>48</sup> clearly addressed itself to all who disputed the vote. The United Front was again the central pillar of Vermeersch's demonstration, which re-emphasised the need for the unity of action between communists and socialists 'against reaction and war'. According to her, it was highly improbable that a socialist worker would support the war in Algeria. 'Why not ask him to join in against the ultra-colonialists?'<sup>49</sup>

Jeannette Vermeersch did not seem to doubt the possibilities of achieving peace in Algeria through 'unity of action' and did not accept that reservations about the vote might be justified.

Many more questions must have found their way to the Party leadership, as is evidenced by Maurice Thorez's speech at the June 1956 congress. 'Naturally some emotion was manifested in the party following this vote.'<sup>50</sup>

Thorez's statement was much more nuanced than Vermeersch's. In an attempt to reassure Party members and pacify critics, he even commended the comrades who asked questions about the vote for their 'proletarian internationalism'. He then replied that there were no grounds for concern, since the vote itself had enabled communists to develop mass actions against the war whenever Party members were prepared to unite with

the Socialists. Thorez made a concession to his opponents, admitting that the PCF had to an extent served to cover up for socialist leaders.<sup>51</sup> This move secured Thorez's position, taking the edge off criticisms against the vote. In the meantime the Party insisted on blaming the 'opportunism' or 'sectarianism' of Party members wherever its expectations of reinforced unity between socialists and communists remained unfulfilled.<sup>52</sup> 'Sectarian' was most likely intended to apply to Party members who had been opposed to the Party's vote. In other words, the Party continued to consider its line as correct, recognising that there were insufficiencies in the implementation of the United Front policy.

Much later, Léon Feix pressed a similar point, more strongly, not only incriminating a few individuals for a wrong implementation of the line, but calling the whole tactics 'tactics from the top'; this imperceptively denotes that the Party was rethinking its vote.<sup>53</sup>

Later the PCF went as far as to accuse the socialists of taking over the policies of the right-wing; yet it never admitted to being in the wrong for supporting the Socialist party. Etienne Fajon, in a recent book, expressed misgivings about the vote, at least in his individual capacity, perhaps reflecting a more official opinion: 'I personally think today that it [the decision to vote for the Special Powers] was very doubtful.'<sup>54</sup>

The PCF was definitely caught on the horns of a dilemma; once it had laid down the United Front as a pillar of its policy – with a long-term perspective towards a popular front and a peaceful road to socialism in France – the PCF was led to commit everything to this United Front and felt it had to vote for Guy Mollet in order to demonstrate its own sincerity and its trust in the United Front. Otherwise the members of the Socialist Party might have suspected that all these appeals for unity on the part of the PCF remained mere verbiage when they were confronted with deeds: could the Party have risked what it saw as compromising the broader aspect of the new possibilities offered by Parliament?

One can envisage the possibility of grouping together, around the working class, the labouring peasantry, craftsmen, intellectuals, that is to say the majority of the people of France, and of transforming Parliament, with the help of

this alliance between the proletariat and the middle classes, from an instrument of bourgeois dictatorship, into one of genuine popular will.<sup>55</sup>

Maurice Thorez's argument on 'the whole and the part' might, under certain circumstances, have been convincing but it was a double edged blade. Jean Baby turned it against the Party's theses. According to Baby, the war was the crucial problem in these historical circumstances and therefore the PCF was actually sacrificing the whole (the struggle against the Algerian war) to the part (a tactical unity with the Socialist Party).<sup>56</sup> Baby refuted the argument that peace in Algeria could be attained through Guy Mollet in power. Mollet, he insisted, had 'capitulated in front of the *ultras*'.<sup>57</sup> Other Party members, *oppositionnels*, shared Baby's opinion.<sup>58</sup> Yet it is understandable that the home front preoccupied the Party first and foremost, but subsequent developments seem to lend strength to Baby's opinion. The Algerian war was to be a determining factor for the situation in France, as it bred fascist threats to the republic and also brought De Gaulle to power. In 1956, a minority of people in France were aware of the gravity of the situation and could envisage that such dramatic events would emerge from the war. Even among communists, the Algerian war generally came second to other considerations such as the hopes they had invested in the Socialist government.

Nonetheless, the PCF could not deny that its vote in favour of the Special Powers had contributed to the escalation of the war. And a number of communist members had argued at the time that such a violation of principles, of the internationalist support they owed the Algerian struggle, could not be excused by tactical considerations. It was the responsibility of the PCF to be able to assess the real consequences of its actions, in view of its analysis of the world situation, and its knowledge that the era of colonialism was doomed. But could the chain of events leading to a dangerous destabilisation in France have been averted? What was the policy to be pursued? The answer supplied by the *oppositionnels* called for a more decided involvement in actions against the war. How and what will be the subject matter of the next section.

## ACTION AGAINST THE WAR

### **The *Mouvement des Rappelés*\***

In addition to the major decision taken in the National Assembly to approve the Special Powers, and partly as a result of it, the Party was faced with the increasing involvement of the French army in Algeria. This included not only the professional army but also the conscripts and thus affected a good proportion of the youth of France.

As the conflict deepened in North Africa, the regular army could not suffice any more. Conscripts were called and recalled for prolonged national service. Hence the '*Mouvements des appelés et rappelés*'. Spontaneous movements arose among the young soldiers ready to be shipped to Algeria, and the first wave of protests took place in 1955 among the *rappelés*. The feeling was high among conscripts against their departure for North Africa. *Le Monde* reported 'incidents' at the Gare de Lyon at the beginning of September, where four hundred *rappelés* from the air force refused to board the train bound for Marseille. Scuffles with the police ensued and the station had to be evacuated.<sup>59</sup> In October six hundred *rappelés* refused to leave their barracks in Rouen (Caserne Richepanse); violent battles took place between the conscripts and civilians and the forces of the law.<sup>60</sup> Many more similar events could be cited, in Limoges, Ussel, Lyon and elsewhere during the same months. In 1956, the Special Powers enabled the government to commit the army fully to the Algerian enterprise. On 1 April, seventy thousand *disponibles* (conscripts who have completed their time of service but are still liable to be called up for a further period) were recalled and more were to follow. A new tide of protests among the *rappelés* followed suit, wider and more violent than in 1955. In Grenoble, thousands of demonstrators, soldiers and civilians, tried to prevent the departure of trains full of *rappelés*. Encounters with the riot police caused disruption among trains, and a number of demonstrators were hurt. In Vierzon one thousand demonstrated on 21 April 1956.<sup>61</sup>

The Communist Party supported the *Mouvement des rappelés*, at least to a fair extent.<sup>62</sup> *L'Humanité* reported the demonstrations and local sections of the PCF took part. M. Molinier,

the communist mayor of Aigues-Mortes (Gard) was suspended by the *préfecture* for a month on account of his participation in the demonstration against the departure of conscripts.<sup>63</sup> It is highly improbable that the Party might have 'orchestrated' those protest movements, as no instructions are to be found in PCF publications for their organisation. Of course, one cannot guarantee that no secret instructions were circulated by the PCF to its young members; however, I tend to assume that if that were true, the persons interviewed would have heard of and mentioned their existence. It is more plausible to accept the Party's word for it when it vehemently denied that young communists should or would have encouraged disobedience.<sup>64</sup>

The Party made it clear that it would not condone 'disobedience', and supported the notion that it had in no way launched those movements or had any intention of doing so. The meaning of this conscript's symbolic gesture was provided by Roland Leroy commenting on the Rouen events: 'The soldiers have never carried out what bourgeois newspapers call "mutiny" or "mass desertion" . . . On the contrary their action had a highly patriotic significance.'<sup>65</sup>

The denial that the soldiers could possibly have been staging a 'mutiny' is worth pondering. The Party appears to have been caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, it wished to support the young *rappelés* protesting against the war, on the other hand, it refused to be associated with actions directed against France. This is why Roland Leroy rejected the term of 'mutiny' applied to the young soldiers, although their refusal to go and fight in Algeria strangely resembled mutiny. Instead Leroy called their protest an act of 'patriotism', as they refused to participate in a war which was seen by the PCF as running counter to France's interests. The Party here restated its allegiance to the motherland, in opposition to the bourgeoisie's 'betrayal' of the French nation.

In 1956, when some demonstrators indulged in expressions of protest in a more radical fashion, such as pouring cement onto the rails to immobilise a trainload of conscripts, the Party disavowed them publicly and accused them of being provocateurs. On another occasion, the Party showed such law-abiding virtues that, according to one *oppositionnel* journal, it was congratulated by the police.<sup>66</sup> The PCF preferred to rely on more 'dignified' methods like petitions.<sup>67</sup>



The limited support offered by the PCF to the *Mouvement des rappelés* did not gain the *oppositionnels*' approval. They criticised the Party for its inefficiency. They had hoped for a wide-scale action against the war; the intensity of the *contingent's* discontent bore witness to the scale of possibilities. Without a political leadership, those movements were doomed to failure. The *oppositionnels* stated openly that the Party ought to have provided that leadership.<sup>68</sup> They expected a more radical approach to the Algerian war, 'a large-scale action' which would have signified devoting important resources to this particular problem, perhaps turning it into a principal item of policy determining the others. The full consequences of such a position were alluded to by *la Voie Communiste*: 'Finally it is the line of the PCF which will have a determining effect . . . Will the Party say: Long live Algerian independence, Long live military evacuation, Long live fraternisation between French and Algerian soldiers.'<sup>69</sup>

*La Voie Communiste* proposed an alternative which meant, in the last analysis, taking on the state and preparing for the possibility of civil war in France. How this would be carried out was not dealt with by the *oppositionnels*.

### ***Refus, Insoumission\****

Subsequently the *mouvements des rappelés* lost their impetus. The most prominent actions shifted to the initiatives of a number of individuals, mobilising their fellow conscripts against the war. Alban Liechti (a member of the communist party) was the originator of such action as early as 1956. On 2 July, Alban Liechti and thirty of his companions sent a letter to the Président du Conseil des Ministres, urging for a cease-fire without delay. In his personal capacity he also sent a letter expressing his refusal to take up arms against the Algerian people fighting for its independence, quoting the Constitution and reasserting his fidelity to the French Republic. He was tried and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Party publications initially ignored Liechti's case. According to Jacques Jurquet, a considerable amount of pressure had to be brought upon the Party for his case to be taken up.<sup>70</sup> And this is corroborated by *Tribune de Discussion* reporting: 'However, as soon as he was arrested his cell had proposed to our leaders

that the Party launch a concerted campaign to free him. It had met with an absolute refusal: "Liechti committed a political error." <sup>71</sup>

Leaflets and articles about Liechti surfaced towards the middle of 1957. By then further soldiers had followed in his footsteps and the Party took up their defence; a leaflet entitled *Des jeunes qui servent l'intérêt de la France*<sup>72</sup> published twenty or so names connected with refusals to fight the war. In 1956, Liechti's defence had not been upheld by the Party. One can reasonably assume that this attitude was motivated by the desire not to undermine the United Front. By the end of 1957, and more daringly in 1958, the PCF acknowledged Liechti's actions and supported them; at the same time it reiterated its opposition to 'individual actions'. If the Party treated these acts as 'individual actions', it should not have backed them, either in 1956 or in 1958; if they were not so, as seems to be the case (Liechti, Magnien and others mobilised their fellow conscripts), should not the Party have generated them rather than backing them up a posteriori as an afterthought? There is no evidence to show that these young communists acted upon instructions from the Party. The Communist Youth counted around one hundred thousand members; if a directive had been addressed to them by the PCF official circles, it would most probably have prompted many more youths to emulate Liechti and Magnien.

Nearly sixteen years later, Elie Mignot presented Liechti as one of the heroes of the fight against the Algerian war,<sup>73</sup> in an attempt to prove the Party's committed opposition to the war, claiming for itself Liechti's glory. As regards individual acts of desertion which were castigated by the PCF, the *oppositionnels* laid the blame on the Party.<sup>74</sup> It was, said the *oppositionnels*, out of desperation that soldiers slipped into individual actions because there was no framework available for them to act in an organised fashion; the PCF failed to provide it. Communist members kept putting the question to their Party: 'The young people don't want to leave for Algeria, what must we do in those circumstances?' And the answer would come invariably that 'a communist does not desert but goes to war to fight the war'. Another question naturally sprang up: how to achieve this result, how to actually mobilise against the war while in uniform and on Algerian soil? *La Voie Communiste* reported this

conversation among Party members: 'As a friend coming back from Algeria was saying: "You cannot do anything there, you are put in the nick at once. When youngsters leave the UJCF does not do anything for them. When they are there it does not do much more"'.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, the task was not so simple; according to witnesses, there was no Party apparatus able to direct and advise conscripts after they reached Algeria; they were left once more to depend on their individual initiatives. 'Work against the war' on Algerian soil was rendered extremely difficult as conscript units were overseen by tough professionals. Others voiced their disappointment at the lack of publicity offered by the Party in support of their action.<sup>76</sup> What was the alternative action proposed by the *oppositionalnels*? *Unir* in its 'Dossier Algérien' and *l'Étincelle* recall the campaigns and actions organised during the Rif war as a model of what was to be done.<sup>77</sup> The *oppositionalnels* envisaged a large-scale action encompassing strikes in France itself as well as action in the army. In their eyes, if it had been possible for the Rif with a small Party when only the professional army was concerned, how much more momentous the action against the Algerian war could have been with a strong communist party, and the discontent aroused by the use of conscripts.

### **The Union des Etudiants Communistes**

The Union des Etudiants Communistes (UEC) was founded towards the end of 1956 as part of a restructuring of communist youth organisation. It became sensitised to the Algerian war and the need for concrete action, which contributed to the later rift between PCF and UEC leadership.

From the time of the UEC second congress (February 1958), *le Communiste* noted a very definite move in favour of an increased action to end the war in Algeria. The struggle against the war was pushed to the forefront by a 'strong minority'.<sup>78</sup> In 1957, *Clarté* reported students' demonstrations for peace in Algeria and published a number of articles publicising the actions of Liechti, Magnien and others. It also denounced the tortures inflicted on Maurice Audin and Djamilla Bouhired.

In March 1960, *Clarté* recorded a new government offensive against the *sursis*<sup>79</sup> (students who benefited from a remission

and were permitted to postpone serving in Algeria until the end of their studies). The hostility of students to the war was growing consistently.

In September 1960, the Union des Etudiants Communistes pronounced itself firmly against the sending of the *contingent* to Algeria. 'No conscription at 18. No conscripts to Algeria. Immediate negotiation with the GPRA. Peace in Algeria.'<sup>80</sup>

An interview between *le Communiste* (an *oppositionnel* review) and an official of the UEC explained how the communist students' youth organisation was led to take that step. The lack of PCF militant initiatives against the war, combined with the appeal of active groups, entailed the loss of interest from UEC members and stagnation. The new motto on the contrary attracted new recruits to the UEC.<sup>81</sup> The PCF leadership cautiously echoed the slogans of the UEC through an article written by Jean-Pierre Vigier who stated 'no conscripts in Algeria, but no desertion'.

A fresh cause for disagreements arose with the 27 October demonstration, organised by the Union Nationale des Etudiants Français (UNEF), the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDF) and the Fédération de l'Education Nationale (FEN) for peace in Algeria. The planned demonstration was banned but was replaced by a massive meeting at the Mutualité, a meeting hall in the Latin quarter. The Party and the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) dissociated themselves from it and proposed alternative small gatherings in front of townhalls on a district basis. Apparently, an internal debate confronted Party and UEC leaderships. The latter wished to organise a demonstration, marching along the Avenue des Gobelins, to join the central meeting organised in the Mutualité. 'The leadership of the UEC was accused of being drawn "into provocative action aimed at leading to a ban of the Party".'<sup>82</sup>

The UEC complied with the Party's decision. Notwithstanding, the Mutualité meeting surpassed all expectations: 20 000 strong, it had to spill over into the adjacent square. Despite the UEC instructions, a good number of UEC members attended the meeting and some 'threatened to resign if they were forbidden to go to the Mutualité'.<sup>83</sup>

This was confirmed by interviews of communists (who were students at the time). The Party mainly explained its absence

from the meeting by the fact that it had not been duly consulted in its preparation and would 'never accept to be merely a support force'.<sup>84</sup>

The UEC, faced with blatant acts of disobedience amongst its own members, thereafter felt confident to take more consistent measures in favour of action. In December 1960, *Clarté* published an interview with Pierre Gaudez, the President of the UNEF.<sup>85</sup> Opening its columns to the UNEF, the UEC manifested its readiness to engage in unitary actions against the war. This constitutes a noticeable change of attitude and a break from the Party's position. This could not be done without considerable internal conflict. In his *Histoire intérieure du Parti Communiste*, Philippe Robrieux gives a detailed account of a confrontation between the UEC representative (himself as General Secretary of the UEC) on the one hand, and Maurice Thorez's followers on the other hand during a heated session of the Central Committee on 15 December 1960.<sup>86</sup> Thorez and Vermeersch attacked the UEC delegate for his partial attitude to the UNEF, calling Gaudez and other leaders of the UNEF 'a small ultra-left grouping in the pay of De Gaulle, and without influence upon the vast majority of students'.<sup>87</sup>

Robrieux violently refuted this claim, quoting the massive electoral success of the UNEF to demonstrate its wide-ranging influence amongst the students. Moreover, he argued that the UNEF's alliance with the UGEMA (the Algerian students' organisation which supported the FLN), as a central theme of its electoral campaign, was proof of the students' readiness to involve themselves in actions against the Algerian war.<sup>88</sup>

The UEC pursued this line of policy despite the disapproval of the Party, and took up an increasingly more definite and active position against the war. At a later date the UEC monitored a full plan of actions against the war.

To act on four fronts: 1. To encourage the circulation of petitions in the largest number of schools . . . 2. To launch between February and June a vigorous campaign of meetings and demonstrations . . . 3. To continue and increase street demonstrations in the following few days. 4. To help young soldiers to step up their struggle against the war.<sup>89</sup>

At last the Communist Youth Movement took into its hands the long awaited task of preparing young recruits for 'mass

work' against the war, organising preparatory meetings before their conscription.<sup>90</sup>

The evolution of the UEC resulted from a combination of factors. The most obvious element to be taken into account was the real radicalisation of the student's movement and its organisation, the UNEF, to which communist students could not remain indifferent. It was made possible for the UEC to hold diverging views from the PCF by general developments in the International Communist Movement and their repercussions within the Party. Many UEC members and leaders were ardent promoters of the 'destalinisation' process opened up by the 'Krushchev report' in 1956 and furthered by the Italian Communist Party. According to Richard Johnson, Maurice Thorez feared that his own hegemony within the PCF might be challenged by followers of the Italian theses.<sup>91</sup> There were many of them in the UEC; there were also some amongst Thorez's closest collaborators. Laurent Casanova, the most prominent one, proposed a new analysis of the Gaullist phenomenon, identifying De Gaulle as the representative of a 'national bourgeoisie', as opposed to the Party's official analysis which treated all bourgeois as traitors to the nation. He also encouraged more activities against the Algerian war in liaison with other progressive forces, for instance he would have liked to see the UEC and the CGT participate in the Mutualité meeting. Philippe Robrieux sees in Maurice Thorez's hostility towards Casanova a major reason for his refusal to accept unitary actions with organisations other than PCF sponsored ones against the Algerian war. Laurent Casanova was bold enough to meet Francis Jeanson, who acted as mediator for the FLN, to discuss a possible agreement between the PCF and the FLN. Waldeck-Rochet, who was to replace Casanova as PCF representative, cancelled further meetings.<sup>92</sup>

### **Working in Committees**

The urge to engage in some sort of action against the Algerian war was so pressing that young communists became involved in various types of committees and organisations relating to the Algerian problem. The first committees were formed under the impetus of the *Mouvement des rappelés* but subsided rapidly.

Others were mostly composed of intellectuals and could be classed into five main categories.

1. General committees for peace in Algeria organised on a professional or area basis:
  - (a) Comité National d'information et d'action pour la solution pacifique des problèmes d'Afrique du Nord (Jean Dresch, Charles-André Julien . . . ) which was instrumental in organising the Journée nationale pour la fin de la guerre d'Algérie in Montreuil, 5 February 1956.
  - (b) Comité de liaison de l'enseignement secondaire pour la paix en Algérie (Madeleine Rébérioux, Bianca Lamblin) which gathered a wide spectrum of *lycées* delegates from diverse tendencies of the left.
  - (c) Comité des intellectuels français contre la poursuite de la guerre en Afrique du Nord (R. Barrat, D. Mascolo, J. Amrouche, D. Guerin, A. Stibbe, J. Dresch, A. Mandouze, A. Césaire, J.-P. Sartre (end of 1955)).
  - (d) Comité Universitaire pour la paix en Algérie (active at the beginning of 1956).
  - (e) Comité ouvrier contre la guerre d'Algérie which represented 120 enterprises (factories) in Montreuil. It was very active in organising agitation against the war (Simon Blumenthal).<sup>93</sup>
2. Committees against torture, the most famous one being the Comité Maurice Audin. Maurice Audin, a young communist, was arrested and assassinated under torture by the parachutists who faked his evasion in order to cover up their crime (11 June 1957); the committee was formed to expose torture in Algeria and in France. Many well-known intellectuals steered it, among whom were Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Laurent Schwartz, Jean Dresch, Henri Marrou, etc. There was also the Centre de coordination pour la défense des Libertés et de la Paix (Clichy) which published *Témoignage et Documents*, mainly based among Christians (Mission de France).
3. Anti-fascist committees which included in their slogans the demand for peace in Algeria:
  - (a) FUA (beginning of 1961).
  - (b) FACUIRA.

- (c) Comité National Universitaire de Défense de la République (Mme C. Vermeil, J. Bruhat, L. Schwartz).
  - (d) Ligue d'action pour le Rassemblement anti-fasciste (R. Barrat, J. M. Domenach, J. Dresch, V. Leduc, J.P. Vigier).
4. Committees organising *insoumission*, helping deserters to cross the border to Switzerland or to another country, such as Jeune Résistance.
  5. The '*réseaux*' or networks coordinating help for the FLN – hiding FLN members, transporting money and documents – which gained fame when one of them was tried (some of its members were arrested): the Réseau Jeanson (named after its leader Francis Jeanson). The scandal reached a climax with the 'Déclaration des 121', approving *insoumission*, signed by 121 French personalities.

Members of the Communist Party could be found among all five categories of committees, either openly or more discreetly. Names of communists (such as Jean Dresch, Madeleine Rébérioux) appeared recurrently in steering committees or as signatories of important declarations.

The PCF did not encourage or instruct its members to join those committees, but tolerated their doing so, with respect to the first three types. It occasionally disparaged the committees, arguing that a committee against torture was diversionary,<sup>94</sup> the main issue being the war or De Gaulle and it even looked down at the anti-fascist league.<sup>95</sup>

The Party vigorously promoted the centralising of all actions on Algeria around the Peace Movement, which was born under the aegis of communist parties. Some communists and non-communists participating in organisations other than the PC sponsored Peace Movement retorted that the Peace Movement was not suited to the purpose of fighting for peace in Algeria. Born in 1949 from the Stockholm conference, the Peace Movement worked for the defence of the USSR against US threats of war, for disarmament and international *détente* (after 1956) and against nuclear armament. Its members and activists were not necessarily sensitised to the question of the Algerian war and it failed to attract or mobilise support on that issue. As for the Peace Movement itself, it was sometimes hampered by the Party's concern that it should not detract from the Party



policy. Laurent Casanova was penalised by the Party because, among other 'mistakes', he allowed the broadening of the Peace Movement on a more unitary, independent basis.<sup>96</sup>

As regards organisations militating for *insoumission* or collaborating with the FLN, the PCF never condoned its members' joining them. They were expelled from the PCF at once. *Oppositionnels*' reviews quoted a number of such cases.<sup>97</sup> The PCF put forward two main reasons for its severe attitude. First, it feared being banned: 'We have just bought a house and this is not the time to be forced into illegality and to have everything confiscated. This is what the forces of reactions are hoping for.'<sup>98</sup> Communist *oppositionnels* generally laid the blame at the feet of the PCF for individual actions and retorted that, in any case, the first step in illegality had been taken in 1958 by the right-wing. Second, the Party reiterated the Leninist principle that a communist soldier does not desert but goes to war to fight the war instead of engaging in individual actions which would cut him off from the masses.

Many an argument blossomed in reply to the Party:

1. If the Party seriously meant its policy, it should have organised and coordinated the soldiers' 'fight against the war', once they found themselves on the battlefield.
2. The PCF had quoted Lenin out of context, claimed *Vérité Pour*. At the time of the Great War, the prevailing chauvinism made it impossible for individuals to refuse to go to war; they would have cut themselves off from the masses. During the Algerian war collective refusal could have been mustered, the war being popular neither with conscripts nor civilians.<sup>99</sup>
3. In the eyes of the *oppositionnels*, the Algerian war was not comparable to the First World War. The Algerian national liberation struggle was an ally of the French working class against its own bourgeoisie and imperialism. The correct course of action was, therefore, to help the 'enemy', the FLN, which was waging a 'just' war.<sup>100</sup> A lot of discreet acts were effected in that direction by communist members believing that they were supporting the 'just' war of the FLN against French imperialism; it is on this basis that a prominent communist handed over the ordnance survey maps of Algeria to the FLN.<sup>101</sup>

The Party's hostility to these actions softened as was testified by its reaction to the Déclaration of the 121, of which a few communist members were signatories.<sup>102</sup> In his article Jean-Pierre Vigier gave a formal support to the 121 against government repression, at the same time as condemning *insoumission*.<sup>103</sup>

These few concrete examples of the PCF's attitude towards France's military involvement tally with the Party's general approach to the army and its theoretical analysis of the nation.

There are discrepancies but no profound inconsistency in its modified respective positions on work amongst the soldiers in 1956, 1958 and 1960. Its strategy remained the same, concentrating on the situation in France and working towards propitious conditions for the coming to office of progressive forces led by the PCF. Strategically, the main force to be considered was the French working class and its allies in France; the spectrum of allies would vary according to the circumstances. The national liberation movements were considered as a reserve, i.e. a secondary force in the task of defeating the imperialist system. Consequently, it is not astonishing that the United Front should have taken precedence over the Special Powers in Algeria: hence the blackout on Liechti and the like in the Party press in 1956.

The immense hopes that the PCF invested into the 1956 election which allowed its emergence from a decade-long isolation supplied a powerful reason in favour of compromises with the Socialist Party. In the opinion of the PCF, the main ally of the working class was to be found in the Socialist Party. It saw in this episode a potential repeat of the Popular Front under new circumstances, and a *sine qua non* condition for any possibility of improvements.

After March 1956 the situation degenerated. Repression increased, democratic liberties were eroded further, France intervened in Suez; the Fourth Republic was soon vacillating. The PCF felt obliged to proclaim its patriotism and its fidelity to the Constitution of the Republic against the looming figure of De Gaulle. After hesitating to agitate against the war amongst the *contingent* for the sake of the United Front in 1956, it held back its action in the army for the sake of the Republic in 1958. This was in keeping with the Party's own profound democratic and patriotic convictions, and with its analysis of the French nation and proletariat. In 1958, if it supported the

*appelés* and *rappelés*, who mobilised against the war, it did not launch any action on a mass scale and it also carefully worded its propaganda. For example, a leaflet printed in support of Michel de Ré who was sent to jail for refusing to fight in Algeria was entitled *En prison pour . . . Crime de Patriotisme*.<sup>104</sup> The Party, after May 1958, tried to muster all the patriotic and democratic forces against a possible fascist threat (De Gaulle, the OAS, . . . ). The letters published by the Party from conscripts refusing to fight, consistently reasserted their allegiance to France, to the Constitution and the Republic. Moreover, throughout this period, the Party was careful not to give any indication that it might have been encouraging large-scale protests in the army. It feared being accused of treason and thrown into illegality.

By the end of 1960, a more decisive leadership was exercised by the Union des Étudiants Communistes. But the mass movement had gathered so much impetus that there was no longer any risk of isolation for communists if they adopted a more radical position. In addition, the link between the struggle against fascism and the Algerian war had become clearer. Despite the UEC's initiative, the leadership of the Party continued to disapprove of unitary actions against the war. The rivalry between Maurice Thorez and Laurent Casanova, who gave his support to the UEC, sharpened internal contradictions. The affinities between the UEC leadership, Laurent Casanova and the Italian Communist Party, which entertained official relations with the FLN (the Feltrinelli Institute offered its facilities to FLN delegates) may have aggravated matters.<sup>105</sup> During encounters within the International Communist Movement at the time the PCF did not appear to see eye to eye with its Italian counterpart. As a consequence, the official PCF position did not allow an unrestrained effort from its members against the Algerian war.

The Party kept refusing to ratify *insoumission*. Launching a fully fledged action against the Algerian war amongst French soldiers might have entailed taking on the State, civil war and revolution. The PCF judged that it would be 'opportunistic' to subordinate the issue of 'revolution' in France for which it was not ready, to the Algerian question. Furthermore, its newly developed strategy of the 'peaceful road to socialism' rendered the Party more reluctant to adopt the idea of violent revolution

and enhanced the importance of securing alliances: United Front, patriots and democrats, and of preserving the 'democratic' system: the Republic and the National Assembly. Repeatedly the PCF stated its opposition to desertion under any circumstances. And it seemed to have found a justification for its slogan in the victory of 'mutinied' conscripts against their fascist officers staging a putsch in 1961: 'We stressed at the time of the Manifesto of the 121 that desertion could not be considered an efficient instrument of struggle against the war, that mass political struggle had to include the army. Our motto was borne out in real life.'<sup>106</sup>

In practice, the Party unreservedly joined in with other progressive forces against the Algerian war only when it took the shape of a demonstration against the OAS and fascism. Hence the tragedy of Charonnes (2 February 1962) where eight communists were killed by the police forces.

A few questions could be asked of the Party. Was it necessary to limit the Party's role to such limited actions to suit the general strategy? Bourgeois democracy was saved, but there is no indication that any progress was made to bring about socialism in France, which was the stated aim of the PCF.

The difficulty is greater for a synopsis of the *oppositionnels*' analysis. Some of their criticisms were limited, or concerned specific issues rather than introduced an alternative comprehensive policy. Nonetheless, the elements of such alternative proposals are to be found. Not only do the *oppositionnels* favour support for the Algerian National Liberation Movement as a question of principle, but their emphasis on a large-scale action against the war sometimes followed from singling out the Algerian question as a first priority. Algeria was the determining factor for the situation in France, they said; the 'degeneration of democracy' in France, which took the concrete shape of the Gaullist power in 1958, was in their eyes prompted and accelerated by the Algerian war. They drew the conclusion that the Party's subordination of the Algerian problem to the United Front was a strategic mistake as well as a violation of principle: 1958 could have been averted by a different policy from the PCF and by decisive action against the war. Some took this line even further, arguing that the Algerian conflict and the state of 'least resistance' of the French government provided an opportunity for the revolutionisation of the situ-

ation in France which the PCF failed to take advantage of. In their eyes a mass movement against the war in France was possible and would have proved stronger than the bourgeoisie's urge to preserve its colonial interests. It might even have tilted the balance in favour of the proletariat, if a class confrontation had taken place. As a consequence, the *oppositionnels* deemed the Party to have betrayed the interests of its own proletariat as well as of the colonial peoples.

France's military involvement in Algeria undoubtedly forced the PCF into a corner. Its procrastination, its unwillingness to take a clear-cut position against the war in deeds as well as in words, led the Party to be outflanked by a mass anti-war movement which attracted young Party members. The Party had argued that it was careful not to alienate the profoundly patriotic French people. The opposite happened. It is probably the patriotism, not to say the nationalism, of the PCF which was eventually surprised and offended by the young people's opposition to the war in Algeria, in particular when this opposition was expressed in terms of active support to the FLN. Between internationalism and nationalism, the PCF seems to have opted for the latter.

## 7 Synthesis on the Opposition

The period 1954–62 witnessed a considerable upsurge of ideological conflict within the PCF. This was the biggest phenomenon of this kind since the mid-twenties. Internal dissenters became significant enough to coin a name for themselves: the '*oppositionnels*' or the 'opposition'. The *oppositionnels* had become psychologically and politically capable of breaking out of the rigid Party mould in which they had been formed. One has to appreciate that for Party members to do this, the situation must have been one of great urgency. It must not be forgotten that almost all the *oppositionnels* accepted and respected democratic centralism as they had been taught to understand it. Moreover, for the duration of the cold war, the isolation of the Party and the attacks it had suffered did not permit internal breaches of discipline as Party members felt it was their duty to close ranks around their organisation. When the threat to the Party lessened, their self-restraint diminished. In addition, the mid-fifties marked the beginning of a world shattering episode for the communist movement, which served as a major catalyst for the mounting opposition within the PCF: the 20th congress of the CPSU. The Krushchev report on Stalin and his sharp turn of policies opened the flood gates for criticisms from all sides. The immediate follow up to the 20th congress, the discord between different communist parties in the world, provided the *oppositionnels* with food for thought and well-documented arguments. After questioning Stalin and the CPSU, PCF members questioned their own Party and saw the need for a good cleaning up of Augeas's stables.

In France itself, the historical conjuncture aggravated the malaise. The PCF, which was emerging from its cold war ghetto, was desperate for recognition and integration into French political life. The Party felt that it should not allow these new opportunities to be jeopardised by its policy towards the Algerian war. The policies of the PCF were judged by the *oppositionnels* as erroneous in many respects and the Algerian

war exacerbated their discontent because of the Party's incapacity to meet such a serious situation.

## OPPOSITIONNEL REVIEWS

It is impossible to find a well defined entity called the opposition with an organic unity and an alternative programme within the PCF during the Algerian war. The opposition remained dispersed and divided even though attempts at unity were made. In the first place, disagreements were expressed through the usual channels such as discussion columns in Party publications prior to each congress, and cell or section meetings, of which it is difficult to know the exact content. Numerous *oppositionnels* felt so strongly that there were inadequate means of expression within the PCF that they created bulletins and reviews in which they could air their opinions and stimulate an exchange of ideas. These publications multiplied during the Algerian war. As was noted above, it does not necessarily imply that they stemmed from a disagreement over the Party line on Algeria alone, but invariably, Algeria would be one of the main items debated in these reviews, either as a matter of priority or as a secondary issue. The reviews and bulletins that have been analysed in this research share several common features.

All of them claimed that they did not intend to dismantle the PCF or create an alternative organisation.<sup>1</sup> They denied vehemently accusations of constituting a faction or of being 'anti-party'. On the contrary, their declared goal was to regenerate the Party, to bring it back to 'democratic and revolutionary Marxist-Leninist principles'. Their contributors are mostly members of the Party or close sympathisers; this explains why the articles are generally not signed by their authors – they ran the risk of being expelled if they became known.

The publications with an exclusively Party readership were distributed via a mailing list; some were eventually sold openly in kiosks (such as *la Voie Communiste*). On the whole, their distribution was mainly aimed at Party members. Some of these bulletins were ephemeral, only lasting a few months. But it appears that the same contributors, or at least some of them, would then collaborate with a newly born publication after the

disappearance of an old one. This reveals an active and lasting nucleus of Party members, who reached out to a network of readers. The number of issues sold regularly ranged from one thousand (the beginnings of *Unir*) to three thousand (claimed by *l'Étincelle*) or more (from five to six thousand for *la Voie Communiste*). The number of readers can be multiplied by two or three since the reviews were passed around from hand to hand<sup>2</sup> and, on the whole, the readership of *oppositionnel* reviews can be estimated at around 20 000. The Party claimed a total membership of 389 030 in 1955, 429 653 in 1956 and 407 000 in 1961.<sup>3</sup> The *oppositionnel* reviews, then, would have reached only 5 per cent of the Party membership. In reality they were more influential than this figure shows, at least amongst one section of the Party, the intellectuals, and in particular regions where they were more concentrated – the Paris, Lyon and Marseille regions.

For a general understanding of the *oppositionnel* reviews, one has to refer to the differences which developed within the International Communist Movement after the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. Naturally, the main protagonists in the ICM – the CPSU, the Italian Communist Party, the Communist Party of China – found followers amongst the *oppositionnels* within the PCF. While all of them welcomed 'destalinisation', different trends can be identified:

1. A number of reviews displayed their interest and sympathies with the Italian Communist Party.<sup>4</sup> They were in favour of an accelerated destalinisation and opposed the prevailing influence of the CPSU over all the other communist parties.<sup>5</sup> They criticised the Soviet Union for its intervention in Hungary in 1956.<sup>6</sup> *Unir*, *l'Étincelle* and *Voies Nouvelles* come in this 'Italian' category, although the last two also showed some interest in Chinese texts and themes.<sup>7</sup>
2. The largest number of arguments which appear to echo the criticisms made by the Communist Party of China against the Soviet Union are to be found in *la Voie Communiste*: challenging the concept of peaceful coexistence and of the peaceful road to socialism, emphasising the importance of national liberation struggles in the colonies.<sup>8</sup>
3. *Le Communiste* is the only one to have shown absolute and consistent support for the Soviet Union, even during the



Hungarian events.<sup>9</sup> This attitude was probably designed to prove that *le Communiste* leaders had totally rejected their Trotskyite ancestry.

4. In addition, Trotskyist elements must be taken into account in an analysis of the *oppositionnel* reviews: these existed mainly in *le Communiste*, *Tribune de Discussion* and *la Voie Communiste*.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the above descriptions, one must not fall into the trap of believing that issues were so clear-cut at the time. On the one hand, similarities of opinion expressed in one review and by another communist party do not indicate that the former was subordinated to the latter and adopted all of its policies. It is likely that the differences of opinion which occurred within the ICM would equally have occurred within the PCF. On the other hand, and more importantly, different trends generally were to be found in one review, in varying strengths, so that it would be erroneous and misleading to slot any of the reviews into a well-defined single category. The fact that divergent trends could coexist within the same journal is a sign of the times. After 1956, the general drive and desire for increased democracy, including the right to criticise, developed the readiness of the *oppositionnels* to tolerate other points of view, lest they fall into a 'stalinist' attitude. Moreover, each trend had not crystallised as yet and was not even well defined at an international level, and this allowed the journals to be flexible in their approach. The split in the ICM was not formalised before the end of the Algerian war, and the alignment of parties into 'camps' was not completed until then. As far as Algeria was concerned and the respective positions of the Italian Communist Party and the Communist Party of China did not differ fundamentally: they both supported the FLN. The Italian Party had opened an office for the FLN in the Feltrinelli Institute; the CPC had declared its disagreement with the 20th congress of the CPSU, which in the CPC's view underplayed the prevalent importance of national liberation struggles in the colonies. As for the Trotskyites, all Trotskyist organisations (apart from one which collaborated with the MNA) supported the FLN.

The *oppositionnel* reviews all disapproved of the PCF response to the Algerian war and of its colonial policy. The PCF support

for the French Union caused a wave of protest from *oppositionnel* reviews which severely condemned the PCF's position on the grounds that it was tantamount to supporting French colonialism and encouraged French chauvinism.<sup>11</sup>

The fundamental reason underlying the reviews' opposition to the French Union can be found in the *oppositionnels'* acute awareness that nationalist ideology prevailed in France and influenced the PCF. All the reviews agreed on this point and the more theoretical ones dealt with this phenomenon at length. The creation of *Unir* itself, in 1952, was prompted by serious conflict over the line adopted at the Central Committee session of 2 and 3 September 1952 on the 'National United Front', which intended to unite all 'good French people' for national independence and peace.<sup>12</sup> *L'Étincelle* and *Voies Nouvelles* devoted a large part of their publication to critical analyses of the French nation and nationalism in an effort to show up the Party's theoretical mistakes in that field: its confusion between nation and proletariat, its glossing over class contradictions.<sup>13</sup> *Le Communiste* adopted a more extreme position, rejecting the possibility of any progressive aspect in national issues in France<sup>14</sup> and considering the nation as a reactionary entity.

The *oppositionnel* reviews did not fail to establish a link between the Party's attitude to the French nation and its policy towards Algeria. They demanded that the Party take up the slogan of independence for Algeria.<sup>15</sup> They stated the need for the PCF, the Party of the proletariat in the imperialist *métropole*, to support the liberation struggle in a French colony, in Algeria,<sup>16</sup> thus following a 'classic' Leninist approach. *Le Communiste* arrived at the same conclusion: independence for Algeria, but from a different standpoint: its analysis emphasised 'the proletarian revolution that is now developing in Algeria',<sup>17</sup> rather than the national liberation aspect. This is consistent with its general distrust of the nation as outlined above. This also explains why *le Communiste* did not produce any analysis of the Algerian nation.

All the other reviews attacked Maurice Thorez's concept of the Algerian nation in formation including the settlers<sup>18</sup> and exposed it as erroneous and dangerous, serving the adversaries of Algerian independence.<sup>19</sup> *L'Étincelle* and *Voies Nouvelles* in particular proposed elements for an alternative analysis of the Algerian nation as an Arab nation excluding the settlers.<sup>20</sup>

As regards France's military involvement in Algeria, the reviews unanimously and severely criticised the Party's vote in favour of the Special Powers.<sup>21</sup> They castigated the PCF for its opportunism and accused it of subordinating everything to the United Front with the Socialist Party. This compromise was considered by all the reviews as totally unacceptable as they saw in it a betrayal of principles. They also agreed that the Party's propaganda and agitation against the war was far from satisfactory, bordering on inertia and limiting itself to timid petitions.<sup>22</sup> They felt that more ideological work was needed amongst the French soldiers, especially among *appelés*.<sup>23</sup>

Action against the war interested the *oppositionnels* in various ways. *Voies Nouvelles*, which comprised prestigious intellectuals, laid the emphasis on the denunciation of torture at the hands of the army and the police<sup>24</sup> – those intellectuals participated in the Comité Maurice Audin. *La Voie Communiste*, which concerned itself less with theoretical questions, concentrated on actions against the war; it publicised and promoted various forms of action: 'committees for peace in Algeria', demonstrations, protests within the *contingent*. It organised the active support of Algerian prisoners held in camps in France (monitoring the sending of parcels).<sup>25</sup> Some of its leading members engaged in agitation for *insoumission* and participated in a network to organise young conscripts who refused to depart for Algeria;<sup>26</sup> others took part in clandestine networks helping the FLN.<sup>27</sup> *Unir* distinguished itself by its declared disapproval of the networks: it dissociated itself clearly from the '*porteurs de valises*', calling Jeanson a 'petty bourgeois pacifist',<sup>28</sup> and it criticised the FLN for acts of 'terrorism' against French soldiers on French soil.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their differences all the reviews reached the same conclusion: that the Algerian war deserved far more attention than it had been accorded by the Party; and they all stated at some point that the Algerian war determined the rest of French politics.

*Unir* argued that the Algerian war was the priority area for the Party, noting disapprovingly that it only figured in fourth position in the Central Committee's resolution of Gennevilliers (19–20 March 1959).<sup>30</sup>

As early as March 1956, *Tribune de Discussion* established and stressed the relationship between supporting the Algerian

struggle and combating the threat of fascism which, they argued, originated from Algeria and extended to France.<sup>31</sup>

*L'Étincelle* and *la Voie Communiste* singled out the liberation struggles in the colonies as the weak link of imperialism in the post Second World War war era;<sup>32</sup> this stood in contrast with the PCF practice which, they pointed out, had constantly laid stress on the contradiction between France and American imperialism. Moreover, *la Voie Communiste* quoted Chinese texts to show that the contradiction between imperialism and national liberation struggles had become the main contradiction in the world (the CPC criticised the CPSU and accused it of underplaying that contradiction), *La Voie Communiste* pledged unconditional support to the Algerian struggle which, it argued, 'brings the problem between the working class and the regime in France to a head'.<sup>33</sup>

For *le Communiste*, the Algerian war crystallised a revolutionary situation, whereby both in France and in Algeria 'the destruction of the imperialist bourgeois power has begun to emerge in concrete terms both in North Africa as well as in France'.<sup>34</sup> This line remained consistent with *le Communiste's* analysis of the Algerian struggle as a proletarian revolution, but little evidence can be found to support this interpretation.

After this general survey, one must turn to a brief study of each individual review, for a better understanding of their role.

*UNIR* – Union Nationale des Indépendants Républicains pour le socialisme – published its first issue on 10 October 1952 with four pages. It stated clearly that both its writers and readers were members of the PCF and took on the task of correcting the Party's organisational principles 'for the return of the PCF to Marxist-Leninist principles'.<sup>35</sup> *Unir* then developed into a substantial monthly review (more than twenty pages after 1956). *Unir* published a short brochure, *Le dossier algérien du PCF*, but generally did not devote most of its attention to Algeria. The greater part of the review was concerned with 'democracy' in the Party and the developments in the International Communist Movement. It demonstrated a particular affinity with the Italian Communist Party.

*Le Communiste* stemmed from a different origin. It distinguished itself from other reviews in so far as its initial nucleus was composed of militants who had split or been

expelled from the Fourth International – a Trotskyist organisation – a few years before launching the journal.<sup>36</sup> Its first issue appeared in August 1954 and stated as its purpose the revolutionary transformation of the PCF. *Le Communiste* had between fifteen and twenty pages. In 1959, it proposed a programme of unity between opposition groups, for the preparation of ideologically sound cadres within the Party, who could prepare the ground and be ready to assume responsibilities, when the Party apparatus collapsed.<sup>37</sup> This sounds very much like a plan for a take-over; it did not take place and *le Communiste* pursued its activities.

Other reviews and bulletins were more closely interlinked. *Tribune de Discussion* and *l'Étincelle*, created separately, soon merged. It appears that their members later founded *Voies Nouvelles* and *la Voie Communiste*. *Tribune Marxiste* welcomed articles from all the other reviews and was more of a general theoretical tribune, 'a forum for theoretical confrontation'.<sup>38</sup>

*Tribune de Discussion* brought out its first issue in March 1956 and claimed to be written by and for Party members only. Striving to obtain 'a real debate' within the Party, it worked to 'develop collectively a political line in conformity with Marxism-Leninism'.<sup>39</sup> It concerned itself primarily with the consequences of two important events: the 20th congress of the CPSU and the Algerian war. *Tribune de Discussion* was only a short bulletin which started from 150 addresses to which it was posted. It soon reached 2000 subscribers. According to private information, *Tribune de Discussion* was created by two different groups which came together: Trotskyists who were using an 'entrism' tactic and PCF members from the 4e, 9e, 11e and 18e *arrondissements* in Paris who genuinely tried to 'rectify' the PCF.<sup>40</sup>

*L'Étincelle* appeared in December 1956 to promote the 'democratic and revolutionary rectification of the PCF'.<sup>41</sup> It was at pains to assert that its members had no intention of organising a 'sect' or a 'party within the Party'. Although it was only a short bulletin (four to six pages), *l'Étincelle* is said to have been very successful, reaching 8000 Party members from its second issue.<sup>42</sup> I was told that two trends combined within *l'Étincelle*, a 'rightist' wing specially concerned with 'destalinisation' and a 'left' trend which emphasised the Algerian question. Apparently some of its members had direct contact with the FLN.<sup>43</sup>

In view of an impending merger with *Tribune de Discussion*, *l'Étincelle* published a special issue on 10 May 1957 stating their main common objectives which were the liquidation of Stalinism in the PCF, the restoration of Leninist principles of internal democracy, support to the anti-imperialist struggles of colonial peoples, and an authentic unity of action in the struggle for socialism.<sup>44</sup>

*L'Étincelle* can be described as more theoretical and *Tribune de Discussion* as more agitational, giving details of the activities of the PCF and Party members. Their merger led to a combination of both aspects; the same themes were pursued until the break up of their cooperation which took place after only a few months. In October 1957, *l'Étincelle* suspended its publication on account of the elimination of the Malenkov – Kaganovitch-Molotov group in the USSR; it assumed that the 'destalinisation' would therefore follow its course. It also believed that the 'triumph of the Leninist tendency' in the USSR would be reflected in the French party. The real reason for the interruption of *l'Étincelle* lies elsewhere according to the interviews carried out; it is alleged that the members of *l'Étincelle* refused to have anything to do with Trotskyism, having discovered the presence of Trotskyist elements among *Tribune de Discussion*.<sup>45</sup> This is plausible enough, as it has been confirmed that a group of 'Frankist' Trotskyists had joined the Party and launched *Tribune de Discussion*.<sup>46</sup>

*Voies Nouvelles* appeared in April 1958 and lasted about a year, ceasing publication because of a lack of funds. Neither a 'political tribune' nor a 'simple information review', it mainly offered its public the findings of what it called 'collective research' into 'social life and action for socialism'.<sup>47</sup> Prominent intellectuals took part in the review, such as members of the notorious Sorbonne Lettres cell. *Voies Nouvelles* was a real journal of over twenty pages, comprising lengthy articles of a high theoretical level based on serious research. It claimed to have 500 subscribers and to sell between 2000 and 2500 copies in newsagents by the time it reached its third issue.<sup>48</sup> On the whole, *Voies Nouvelles* can be said to have an 'Italian' sympathy.

*La Voie Communiste* in January 1958 claimed to continue *l'Étincelle* and *Tribune de Discussion*. It adopted as a principal objective 'to discover the communist road for our country'.<sup>49</sup> Its guidelines sound very similar to the other reviews, including

the liquidation of Stalinism within the Party, a return to Marxist-Leninist principles of internal democracy and revolutionary support for the colonised peoples' anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>50</sup> However, *la Voie Communiste* was the most committed of all the opposition journals to campaign for Algerian independence and support for the FLN. For *la Voie Communiste*, Algeria was definitely the main front and the greater part of the journal was devoted to articles on that issue. *La Voie Communiste* ceased to appear shortly after the termination of the war which had probably acted as a uniting factor between different trends within the journal. Its members split between two groups, those who wished to support the CPC (they represented a substantial section) and the others who opposed that line.

The *oppositionnels'* reviews rapidly acquired wide circulation and gained in influence. The Party could not ignore them any longer and they were mentioned in Party reports.<sup>51</sup> The PCF leadership launched an open political struggle against this opposition and engaged in a serialised attack through several reports in *France Nouvelle* against each of the *oppositionnels'* journals.<sup>52</sup>

This opposition remained dispersed despite the exchange of letters between different reviews and the proposals for a common approach. They tried to coordinate the preparation for the Party's 25th congress, but failed to attain organic unity. The fact is that some reviews, not content with criticising the Party, also spent a fair amount of time criticising other *oppositionnel* groups.<sup>53</sup> *La Voie Communiste* deplored the division of the opposition and its harmful consequences on confused Party members. It argued that the division itself was partly due to the general confusion prevalent in the PCF and the lack of maturity of the opposition. The grounds for opposing the Party line were so numerous and so varied that Party members did not succeed in presenting a coherent organic critique. According to *la Voie Communiste*, 'these points of view are not opposed but complementary'.<sup>54</sup> In reality, it was not sufficient to be *oppositionnels* to attain unity of thought and actions. The international contradictions in the communist movement merely made matters worse. *La Voie Communiste* stated what many others no doubt felt, that 'nobody was able to develop a theoretical platform, not even a programme'.<sup>55</sup>

But even if one group had proposed such a programme, it

is doubtful that other *oppositionnels* would have adopted it. The differences amongst them were too great and eclectic.

## WHENCE THE OPPOSITION?

It is clear from this study of the *oppositionnel* reviews that a general feeling of malaise manifested itself in the PCF in varying degrees on the question of Algeria. How did it happen that individual Party members became aware of the need to devote more attention to Algeria? A few examples may help partly to answer this question. A number of individuals may have been more receptive to the Algerian problem from their background or training: some had lived in North Africa, others studied or taught subjects relative to that region in history or geography. Others had joined the Party during the anti-Vietnam war campaign and remained steeped in anti-colonialism. Some were shaken by the revelations leaking out of Algeria about the mass torture practised by the army. From the generation that had lived through the Second World War a few compared their experience of anti-semitism and Nazism with the anti-Arab racialism of the fifties in France. One ex-Party member interviewed described how the reality of the Algerian war struck him when he witnessed Algerians surrounded and attacked by police dogs in Marseille. He immediately established a parallel with his own experience during the Second World War when he, a resister, found himself surrounded by the dogs of German soldiers in the forest of Mijoux (Haut-Jura).<sup>56</sup>

The specific experience which motivated each individual to expect or demand from the Party a greater commitment against the Algerian war is not so significant. What is more relevant is to identify the groups of Party members from whom the opposition arose on Algeria, and what motivated them. This study reveals that particular categories of Party members were mobilised by particular categories of issues. Is it possible to say that their protests obtained any result on any of those issues?

The organised opposition was mainly composed of what are traditionally referred to as intellectuals, who focused their criticisms of the Party on theoretical issues (the French Union, the Party's approach to the French and Algerian nation, . . . ).



This can be explained easily. The nature of the PCF, claiming to follow Marxism-Leninism, led to the publication of laborious documents endeavouring to justify its policies theoretically. It is safe to assume that intellectuals would be tempted more than others to probe into any possible inconsistencies; they are more likely to be familiar with Marxist classics and could measure the Party's analyses against them. They had access to more documents and were more accustomed to argue over ideas and concepts. This assumption is strengthened by interviews and by Jacques Sylvain in *le Communiste*: 'It is a fact that the majority of communist intellectuals are to be found in the opposition.'<sup>57</sup>

The *oppositionnels* believed that their objections influenced the policy of the PCF. When the French Union was withdrawn from the PCF theses in 1956, *Tribune de Discussion* claimed that this resulted from pressure from the rank and file.<sup>58</sup> *Unir* also attributed to the 'pressure from the rank and file'<sup>59</sup> the Party's proclamation of the Algerian right to independence (early 1957) and *l'Étincelle* supported that view.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, in the first place, there is no way that the Party leadership would admit that it had been influenced by the opposition. And although the *oppositionnels* may have been instrumental in a change of policy, one has to recognise that what really mattered were historical situations. For instance, it was rather incongruous for the Party to support the French Union in 1956, whilst it stood in blatant contradiction with circumstances: Algeria was on fire, waging an armed struggle for independence and the French government did not have the slightest intention of pursuing the French Union (the term had been abandoned altogether).

However, it is undeniable that the Party was worried about the *oppositionnels'* criticisms. It could have ignored them altogether, but instead it acknowledged them in several attempts to answer, explain or justify Party policies.<sup>61</sup> For instance, the cell Sorbonne Lettres was honoured with a special reply to its overall criticism in *France Nouvelle* (22 January 1959). In addition *France Nouvelle* ran a series of articles attacking each *oppositionnel* review, one by one. Occasionally, the Party took more drastic action against its intellectuals. For instance, *le Communiste* reported a rapid turnover in the editorial board of *Nouvelle Critique*; 40 per cent of the board was demoted or

resigned in 1957.<sup>62</sup> Neither of these measures seems to have been successful in silencing these *oppositionnels*.

The vast majority of Party members did not participate in the *oppositionnels*' reviews, but it would be a mistake to conclude from it that they did not feel concerned by the war or that they all agreed with the Party policy on Algeria. The entire Party was affected by France's military involvement. All the young people, including Party members, could understand immediately the concrete consequences of the Special Powers and the Party vote caused a widespread and growing discontent. Their disapproval was not expressed through long exposés but was made evident through the Mouvement des rappelés in which Party members took part, and their refusal to fight in Algeria later on. These actions were performed by less 'intellectual' Party members (who did not benefit from a *sursis* like the students). This is evidenced by a leaflet brought out by the Party: out of thirty young communists who refused to serve in Algeria (but did not desert), twenty-eight were workers, peasants or employees.<sup>63</sup> Disagreement over the Special Powers arose throughout the Party. The *oppositionnel* reviews reported discussions and conflicts within the Party before and after the vote. *Unir* mentioned the numerous letters addressed to the Party leadership on this matter.<sup>64</sup> *Tribune de Discussion* noted protests in four Parisian federations, and in the Somme, the North, the Allier and the Gironde federations.<sup>65</sup> *Le Communiste* affirmed that the opposition as such started from the Special Powers, 'especially in working class circles'.<sup>66</sup> *Tribune de Discussion* described a few examples of Party members' reactions: two members who were *rappelés* tore up their Party cards in a factory cell of the southern suburbs of Paris; in the Seine department, workers protested against the lack of solidarity with the Algerians in a large metallurgy company.<sup>67</sup> Although no precise account of all these actions was provided, their existence alone proves that the Party leadership had not succeeded in fully convincing its membership that its position was correct. The Party seems to have devoted a lot of effort to explaining its vote in favour of the Special Powers, and to persuading Party members to accept it. *Unir* quoted three articles in *l'Humanité*<sup>68</sup> to support the vote on the Special Powers. Expulsions took place to strengthen it.<sup>69</sup> Thesis 42 of the 1956 congress blamed the 'dogmatists' and 'sectarians' who refused

to agree to it.<sup>70</sup> The Party was adamant: it would not go back on its decision, but it failed to suppress criticisms.

The most active single body within the Party to campaign against the Algerian war was the Union des Etudiants Communistes which combined both 'intellectuals' and young people. In this instance, students acted not so much because of theoretical disagreements with the Party leadership, but because they saw their immediate future threatened once the *sursis* had been cancelled. The students' organisation, UNEF, was itself mobilised against the war and influenced the UEC from 1960, when the students' movement gathered momentum. One reason for discontent started in 1956 and continued to grow: the lack of 'actions' against the war on the part of the PCF. Consequently, many a young communist student took upon him/herself to undertake the actions which they believed the Party should have coordinated: this was done in defiance of the Party policy which rejected such acts as *insoumission*, or providing help to the FLN. The development of events, the mounting wave of protest against the war and the actions of its members combined to induce the PCF to make minor adjustments in its position. After condemning all these types of action, it gradually came to tolerate some of them, like Alban Liechti and Serge Magnien's refusal to fight in Algeria. Much later on, the PCF used Liechti's name to prove that it did combat the Algerian war.<sup>71</sup> The Party was much more severe against the *insoumis* or the '*porteurs de valise*'<sup>72</sup> who were automatically expelled as soon as it became known to the PCF. *La Voie Communiste* quoted a few names of Party members who were expelled or forced to resign because they had participated in networks: in the Bouches du Rhône a philosophy teacher (Jacques Deprun), in Marseille Annette Roger, who was also publicly slandered, and others.<sup>73</sup> On another occasion, the Party forbade a communist barrister from defending an arrested Party member who had worked with the networks.<sup>74</sup> And yet, even clandestine activities eventually benefited from a slightly greater tolerance on the part of the PCF. At a very advanced stage of the war, Jean-Pierre Vigier was allowed to write an article paying its respects to all the people who fought against the Algerian war in 'their own way', on the occasion of the Déclaration des 121. The Party members who had signed the Déclaration – contravening the Party line – were not

expelled. One of them described how he was summoned by the higher echelons of the Party (120 Rue Lafayette) and asked to withdraw his signature; when he refused they promised that they 'would not lift a finger to help him' if he was in trouble as a result.<sup>75</sup> This appears as a rather mild retribution in comparison with earlier intransigent measures on the part of the PCF.

In conclusion, it is important to notice that the internal opposition to the PCF continued to grow throughout the Algerian war. Overall, the Party leadership simultaneously used a stick and carrot policy *vis-à-vis* its opposition. On the one hand, the more respectable opposition, that of prominent intellectuals, was half-tolerated; on the other hand, severe measures were taken by the Party. An escalating number of expulsions took place. They were often motivated by the members' participation in *oppositionnel* reviews or simply by their criticisms of the Party line. Expulsions reached such a scale – *Unir* reported 67 of them in two months in 1958 – that 327 Party members launched an appeal against anti-statutory expulsions.<sup>76</sup> *La Voie Communiste* quoted more expulsions in Antony–Cité Universitaire, instigated by Georges Marchais. These members were accused of being Trotskyists, revisionists and '*flics*' (cops). Their comrades were forbidden to speak to them.<sup>77</sup> The whole philosophy circle of the UEC was expelled after it circulated a leaflet against the Algerian war and fascism, in collaboration with socialist students in 1958.<sup>78</sup>

None of the PCF tactics to suppress its opposition seems to have succeeded; the opposition continued unabated.

# Conclusion

The Algerian war proved to be a revealing test for the French Communist Party. Jean Baby summed up best the impact of the war on French politics and the issues with which it confronted the Party:

[The Algerian war] called everything into question including the institutions of France as events have proved. The Algerian affair highlighted, and continues to do so, the problems of French imperialism, of the political role of the army, the fascists danger, the level of wages, the future of the youth, etc. It could not be separated from the problems of Marxism-Leninism either.<sup>1</sup>

The period 1954–62 did not witness an ‘ideological turning point’ in so far as the PCF did not undergo a sudden fundamental change in its approach and policies. Yet it confirmed and consolidated trends that had manifested themselves earlier on. The Party’s view of the French nation, of the relationship between France and Algeria, of the Algerian nation, of the army, all this betrays a loyalty to the Party’s Jauresian, pre-Tours ancestry, and in addition expresses a newly enhanced deep-seated jacobinism on which ‘nationalism which is the oldest and strongest tradition of the French left’<sup>2</sup> was built. The Algerian war demonstrated the increased integration of the PCF into the French nation, not only through its participation in the republican institutions, as has been shown by Irwin Wall,<sup>3</sup> but also in its ideological identification with the ‘grandeur’ of France. This character of the PCF was clearly shown as it translated its theory into political position and action, in answer to the urgent questions posed by the war. The refusal of the Party to commit itself against France was made evident.

The second main aspect to be underlined in a study of the PCF and the Algerian war is the ‘crystallisation’ of the opposition, as was noted by E. J. Hobsbawm.<sup>4</sup> *Oppositionnels* who had until then voiced their opinions as individuals came together and founded a variety of reviews; they eventually took over the communist students’ movement. The grounds for

opposing the Party line were many; Algeria was not the only one and events taking place in the International Communist Movement certainly played an important role. Nonetheless, the opposition taking shape during the Algerian war laid the foundations for later developments.

A significant feature of that period was the low recruitment of young people to the Party, which Marcel Servin noted in the 1959 congress. In 1954, 10.2 per cent of the Party was composed of members less than 25 years old, 54.3 per cent more than 40 years old. In 1959, the less than 25 age group had decreased to 5.6 per cent and the more than 40 age group had increased to 56.2 per cent.<sup>5</sup> These figures do not come as a surprise given the trend that has been identified through this study. The young people had found alternative spheres of action. If no other party as such could compete with the PCF on the left, there were at least many organisations available in which they could become active, particularly over an issue they felt strongly about: the Algerian war. There were all sorts of committees against the war, for peace in Algeria, against torture, against fascism. Later on the UNEF proposed to students a positive 'mass action'.

The embryo of an alternative left was focused around magazines like *France-Observateur* which consistently denounced the Algerian war, *les Temps Modernes* (in which Francis Jeanson, leader of an FLN support network, participated), *Esprit* under the editorship of Jean-Marie Domenach, which attracted left-wing christians (many of them took up radical activities and positions against the war); the Parti Socialiste Autonome merged with disaffected communists and socialists to form the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), which concerned itself with the Algerian war, attracting many intellectuals. Members from all those circles at the same time participated in broad organisations against the war or even in FLN support networks.

But what became of communist *oppositionnels* in the aftermath of the Algerian war? The fate of the Union des Etudiants Communistes provides us with a good illustration of the main streams that arose and developed. The UEC leadership seems to have been sympathetic to the Italian Communist Party and the 'Italians' were in a majority in the UEC.<sup>6</sup> The UEC national Bureau soon came into conflict with the PCF leadership. At the UEC 6th Congress (21 February 1963), the Party

failed to impose its views and the participants gave a standing ovation to the delegate from the PCI.<sup>7</sup> The Party could not tolerate this organised opposition which gained in influence; a campaign was launched against the UEC leadership and all 'Italian' followers. The UEC eventually fell apart and its 8th Congress (4–7 March 1965) resulted in the purging or the departure of former '*majoritaires*'. Some of them went to swell the ranks of the PSU. The *oppositionnel* reviews had also contributed to the dissemination of Italian theses. These crystallised a more social democratic trend within the PCF. A Trotskyist pole of attraction also existed within the UEC, influential in the Sorbonne Lettres sector. Trotskyist elements were present in *oppositionnel* reviews such as *Tribune de Discussion* and *la Voie Communiste*. The Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire, the JCR (Alain Krivine and Weber), was born in April 1966 out of the disintegration of the UEC.<sup>8</sup> They did not have any lasting impact on the PCF itself.

The third trend in the UEC and amongst *oppositionnels* was the pro-Chinese. Strongly based in the Rue d'Ulm (the Ecole Normale Supérieure where Althusser taught) and in other cells of grandes ecoles or universities, the pro-Chinese remained in the UEC for a while after the Bureau National was disbanded in 1965; they set themselves the task of leading an ideological struggle from within. They eventually founded a 'Maoist' organisation, the Union des Jeunesses Communistes Marxistes-Leninistes (UJCML) at the end of 1966.<sup>9</sup> *La Voie Communiste*, which comprised a strong pro-Chinese element, broke up in 1965, split between Trotskyist and Maoist tendencies. Its members were channelled towards one or the other respective organisations. Pro-Chinese elements were to be found among a variety of *oppositionnels*. Jacques Jurquet, who opposed the Party's Algerian policy, became General Secretary of the Parti Communiste Marxiste-Leniniste de France (PCMLF). The Algerian war played a significant role in the crystallisation of these trends and led the PCF to lose its influence amongst the students; the Party expelled one thousand UEC members after the UEC 8th Congress, and lost many more who resigned. Serge Depaquit, former UEC leader, remarks on how the evolution of the communist students' movement prepared the ground for May 1968.<sup>10</sup> For Jean Ferniot, the disintegration of the UEC fertilised the students' '*groupuscules*':

It was the UEC which exploded and which did not recover from this drama. The young activists who kicked up the dust under their feet along the pavements of the Kossuth crossroads fed into the '*groupuscules*'. Since then, the latter unchallenged by the much shrivelled UEC have had free space to develop in Marxist terrain.<sup>11</sup>

During the Algerian war, for the first time, a large movement developed on the left beyond the control of the PCF, mainly amongst young people. This may be considered as a precursor of May 1968.

The opposition and *oppositionnel* reviews provided an arena where future Trotskyists or Maoists could sharpen their ideological weapons. The opposition matured during the Algerian war; its initial aim, expressed in most of the reviews, which was the revolutionary transformation of the PCF, was not fulfilled. Instead it nurtured other groups and trends on the left.

And the Party which continually feared that it might alienate the French masses if it adopted too radical an approach towards the Algerian war, found itself outflanked and overtaken by the mass movement itself. The final sequel to this period was '*le gauchisme*', on a wide scale in 1968.



# Notes and References

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## CHAPTER 1

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- Berbers were bound to Koranic law, which differed from the French law; it imposed a specific way of life and a whole series of rules governing divorce procedures, inheritance, etc: this was called 'personal status'. The Blum-Violette proposal was 'revolutionary' in its acceptance of the personal status. – Joan Gillespie, *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution*, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1976, p. 24.
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  41. Nouschi, p. 117.
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## CONCLUSION

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### Archives

A great many of the documents used for the writing of this thesis were obtained from the personal archives of:  
Janine Cahen (including the original French copy of *Una Resistenza Incompiuta*)  
Jacques Debouzy

Jacques Jurquet  
Jacques Panigel  
André Prenant  
Laurent Schwartz

and from the archives of l'Institut d'Histoire Sociale (which keeps the Fonds Marty)

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